THE CREATIVE HISTORY OF IRAQ

LAND OF THE TWO RIVERS

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Iraq is taking the tide of its fortunes at the flood. As a nation she is in the forefront of the world's most progressive countries.

Yet her ancient heritage as the "cradle of civilization," which has such an important bearing on our own time and which is occupying more and more of the attention of people all over the world, is a significant segment in the broad panorama of this historic land; and this, the third in a new series of handbooks on Iraq, deals with the country's creative history.

In the handbooks that follow, other facets of the country's life will be covered—irrigation and agriculture, industrialisation, health, education and social welfare, communications and cultural and recreational pursuits.

PART 3.—THE CREATIVE HISTORY OF IRAQ

Issued by The Director-General of Guidance and Broadcasting on the occasion of the laying of the Foundation Stone of the new "Iraq Museum."

FOREWORD

This is not a cultural history of Iraq. It is a series of glimpses into a vast and creative history—but glimpses through some original photographic records of real antiquities throughout the cultural story of Ancient Mesopotamia, the birthplace and the home of civilization.

Thanks to the devoted endeavours of archaeologists and scholars from many nations who have worked in the past, or who are still working with us now in various ancient sites in Iraq, it is now possible to trace the origin of many of the things that have gone into the building up of civilization, together with their subsequent evolution and course.

The grandeur and the shortcomings of civilization are all reflected in one way or another in the continuity of history in Iraq.

Credit for the preparation of this publication is due to Sayid Fuad Safar, the Inspector-General of Excavation, and Sayid Bashir Francis, the Specialist Inspector of Antiquities. Achnowledgement is due also to Mr. David Oates, of Cambridge University, and to Sayid Antran Ivan,photographer of the Directorate-General of Antiquities, for their helpful participation.

We offer our thanks to the Directorate-General of Guidance and Broadcasting for its valuable co-operation in making possible the printing of this publication.

NAJI AL-ASIL,
Director-General of Antiquities.

BAGHDAD
February, 1957

The Creative History of Iraq

I. PREHISTORIC TIMES

IRAQ is the basin of the twin rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, and their tributaries, between the high mountains of Sagros to the east and the northern edge of the Arabian plateau to the west. It seems probable that the lower part of this basin, extending from the Tharthar Depression 40 miles north of Baghdad southward to the Persian Gulf, was unsuitable for habitation until about 7,000 years ago since no evidence of earlier settlement has yet been found in this area. Even before this, however, the northern half of Iraq furnished ideal environment for the life of early Man, especially during the fourth and last Ice Age in Europe, which coincided with a pluvial period in the Near East. This is indicated by the discovery of numerous deposits of stone implements on the banks of now dry water-courses, and of settlements of the Lower Palaeolithic period in the highlands of the Provinces of Kirkuk and Erbil. On the mountain sides there are also many caves and rock-shelters, commanding good views over the neighbouring valleys and plains, in which the remains of Palaeolithic settlements have been found.

Fig. 1 shows a standing block of conglomerate, three metres high, at Barda Balka, which can be seen from the main road between Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya in the neighbourhood of Chemchemal. In many ages Man has been attracted by this impressive monolith; it was undoubtedly an object of reverence to him in the Stone Age, and he dwelt beneath its shadow 100,000 years ago. His hand-axes, of which there is an example in *Fig.* 2, litter the site in great numbers: this implement, fashioned by trimming flakes off a stone core, was his most valuable tool, and served for defence and overcoming his prey as well as for digging and cutting wood.

The Shanidar cave (*Fig.* 3), in the mountains of Rowanduz, was first inhabited in the Mousterian period 50,000 years ago. The excavation of the debris that covers its floor has not yet been completed, but it has already produced remarkable finds, such as the skeleton of a child which has aroused great interest among students of Man's physical evolution. In those distant ages Man wandered over the plains and mountains of Iraq, hunting animals—some of them now extinct—and gathering fruit and seed wherever and whenever he could find it for his daily food. As his mind developed and his experiences and discoveries accumulated, he gradually learnt to produce his own food by cultivation and by the domestication of certain breeds of animals. This discovery of food-production is indeed one of the landmarks in human history, and the evidence suggests that it took place as early, if not earlier, in Iraq than anywhere else. In fact, man's whole existence underwent a momentous change about 8,000 years ago, when it became necessary for him to settle close by his field, and when the first huts and villages arose.

It is indeed astonishing that the earliest known houses, built of mud-brick, were already well developed on the essential plan so common in later Iraq, with an open courtyard surrounded by rooms serving the various purposes of the household. The house shown in *Fig.* 4, which was unearthed at Tell Hassuna, south-south-west of Mosul, has two bedrooms, a kitchen with a baking oven made of clay, and a pen for keeping cattle and sheep. Beneath the floors of some of the rooms were found large hemispherical bins for storing grain. Some of the pottery vessels found at Tell Hassuna are illustrated in *Fig.* 5; they show ingenuity and taste in their shape and in their ornamentation, yet they form one of the earliest known groups of pottery, dating back to the beginning of the fifth millenium B.C.



Fig. 1—*A standing block of conglomerate, three metres high, at Barda Balka, which can be seen from the main road between Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya in the neighbourhood of Chemchemal. In many ages Man has been attracted by this impressive monolith : it was undoubtedly an object of reverence to him in the Stone Age, and he dwelt beneath its shadow* 100,000 *years ago*

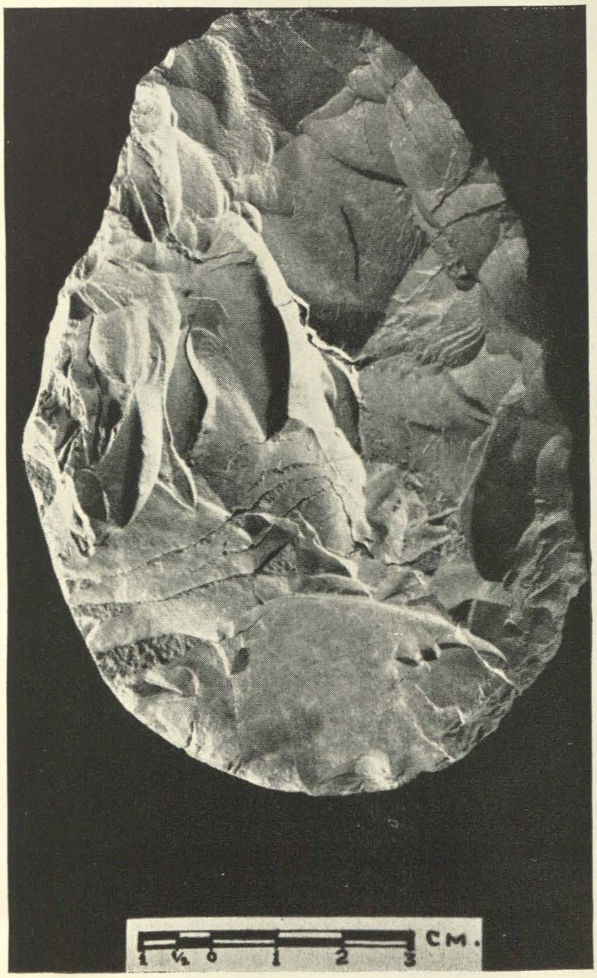


Fig. 2—*An example of the Stone Age hand-axes which litter the Barda Balka site in great numbers. This instrument, fashioned by trimming flakes off a stone core, was the Stone Age man's most valuable tool, serving for defence and overcoming his prey as well as for digging and cutting wood*

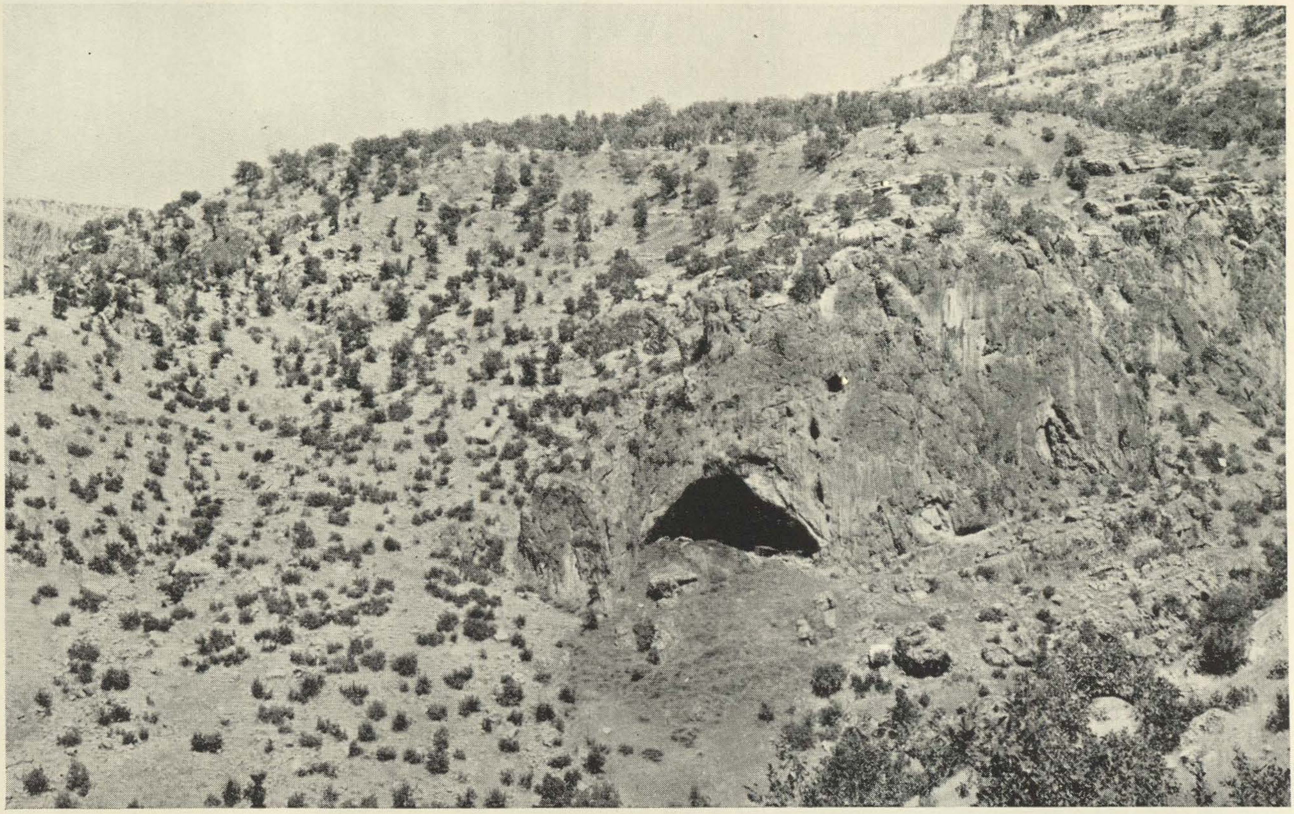


Fig. 3—*The Shanidar Cave, in the mountains of Rowanduz ; it was first inhabited in the Mousterian Period 50,000 years ago*

The development of prehistoric pottery in Iraq culminated in the very fine polychrome painted vessels shown in *Fig.* 6. This example was found at Tell Arpachiya in the neighbourhood of Mosul, but similar types were found on many ancient sites in Asia Minor and Northern Syria.

About 6,000 years ago conditions in Southern Iraq improved, and the earliest known settlement is at Eridu, the holy city of the Sumerians, who believed that it was the first city created by the gods from beneath the overwhelming waters of the Flood. The excavations on the site of Eridu revealed a city of temples and cloisters, with a large priestly population. *Fig.* 7 presents a series of views of the principal shrines, superimposed on one another in 18 successive building levels, the latest of which is the ziggurat, or stepped tower, of the city. These temples are consistently oriented towards the cardinal points, and each contained an altar and offering table. The small temple at the bottom of the picture, found in Level XVI, is only three metres square and is considered to be the earliest religious building in Iraq. Each of these temples was, in its time, the centre of activities at Eridu ; they were dedicated to the chief god of the city Enki, the " Lord of Wisdom and Foresight, and of the Boundless Seas "—we find the name of his abode recorded, after the invention of cuneiform writing as Abzu, the Ocean. The fundamental principles of urban life were known at Eridu even in its earliest days, for we can see evidence of planning and control in the layout of the city, and even of its cemetery.

There were many other towns in the south contemporary with Eridu, among them the great Sumerian city of Uruk, which is mentioned in the Bible under the name of Erech.

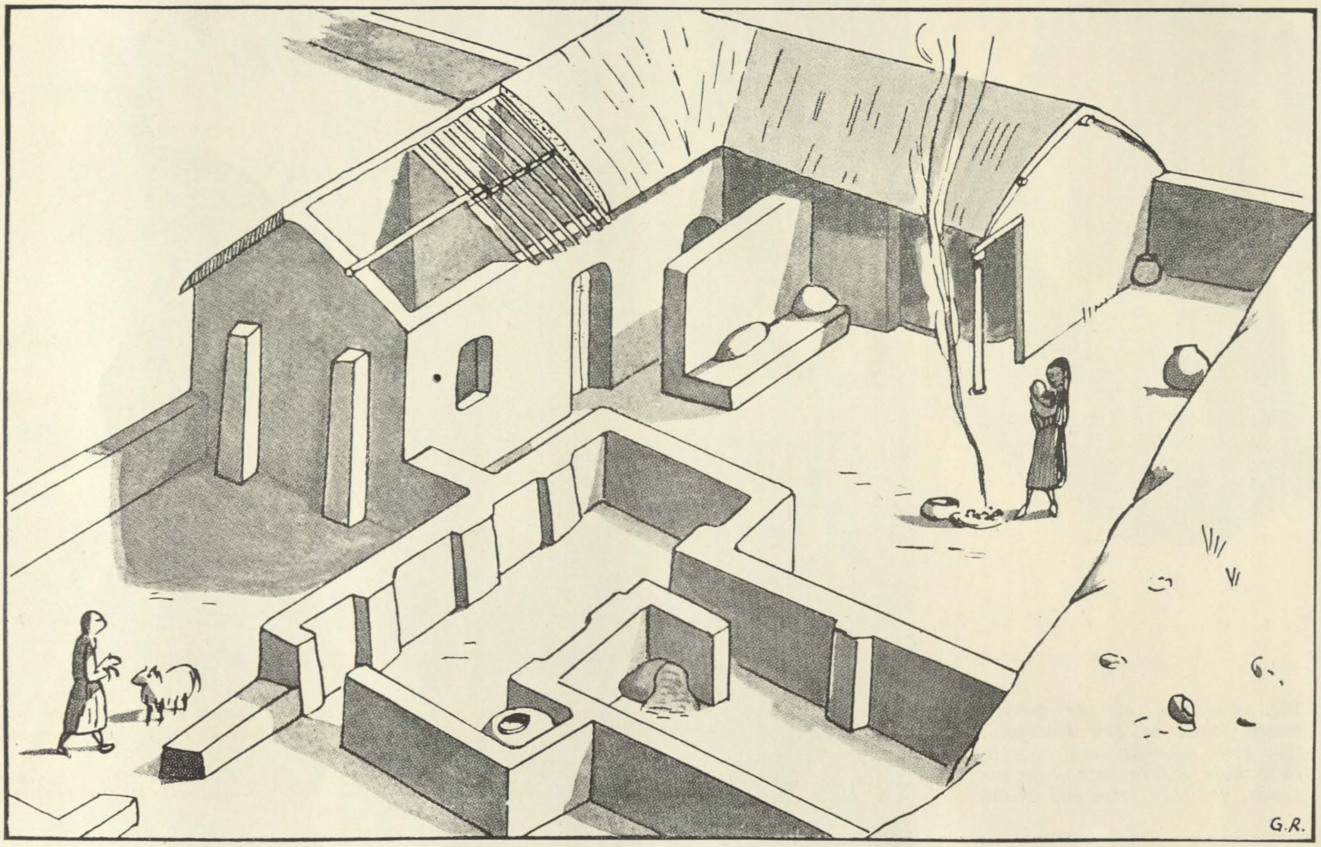


Fig. 4—*Man's whole existence underwent momentous change about 8,000 years ago and the first huts and villages arose. This mud-brick house was unearthed at Tell Hassuna*
From an original drawing by Dr. Georges Roux

By the time of the first known ruling dynasty in Sumeria, the beginning of recorded history, Uruk had grown into the metropolis of Southern Iraq, and it was fortified with a city wall six miles long by one of its early rulers, Gilgamesh, at the beginning of the third millenium B.C. Gilgamesh is more famous for the epic known by his name, which tells us the earliest story of the Flood, and of the vain attempts and labours of Man to attain eternal life.

At this period the transaction of business and social relations necessitated the invention of the first simple method of keeping records, by drawing pictures of the objects or commodities on tablets of clay or stone. *Fig.* 8 shows a stone tablet discovered at Uruk, dating back to the middle of the fourth millenium B.C. It is considered to be the earliest known example of pictorial writing; on it are inscribed records of offerings to the temple, such as slaves and jars of wine. This pictographic script developed gradually into the wedge-shaped characters known as cuneiform, whose use was spread by the Babylonians and Assyrians to the surrounding countries; but cuneiform remains characteristic of the cultures of Iraq, and in it were recorded the knowledge, thoughts and beliefs of our early forebears, written in about 600 known signs, each representing a syllable or a conventional meaning. In Persia and in Phoenicia this script was adapted to local use and gradually developed into the earliest alphabets.

The period in which writing was invented was indeed a great epoch in the history of civilisation, for almost simultaneously other equally important inventions took place. The temples were built on a large scale and lavishly decorated. In *Fig.* 9 is a restored façade of a temple unearthed at Uruk. It is ornamented with stone and coloured mosaics of baked clay, arranged in patterns



Fig. 5—*Some of the pottery vessels found at Tell Hassuna: they show ingenuity and taste in their shape and in their ornamentation, yet they form one of the earliest known groups of pottery, dating back to the fifth millenium B.C.*

Reproduced from original drawings by Dr. Georges Roux

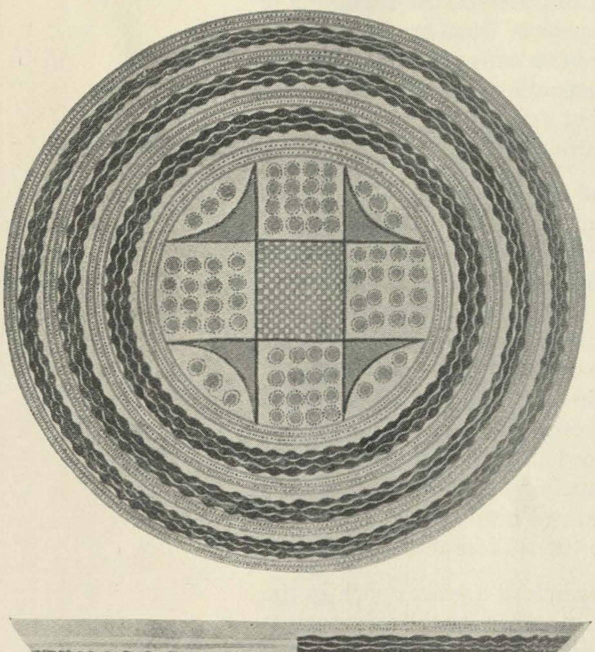


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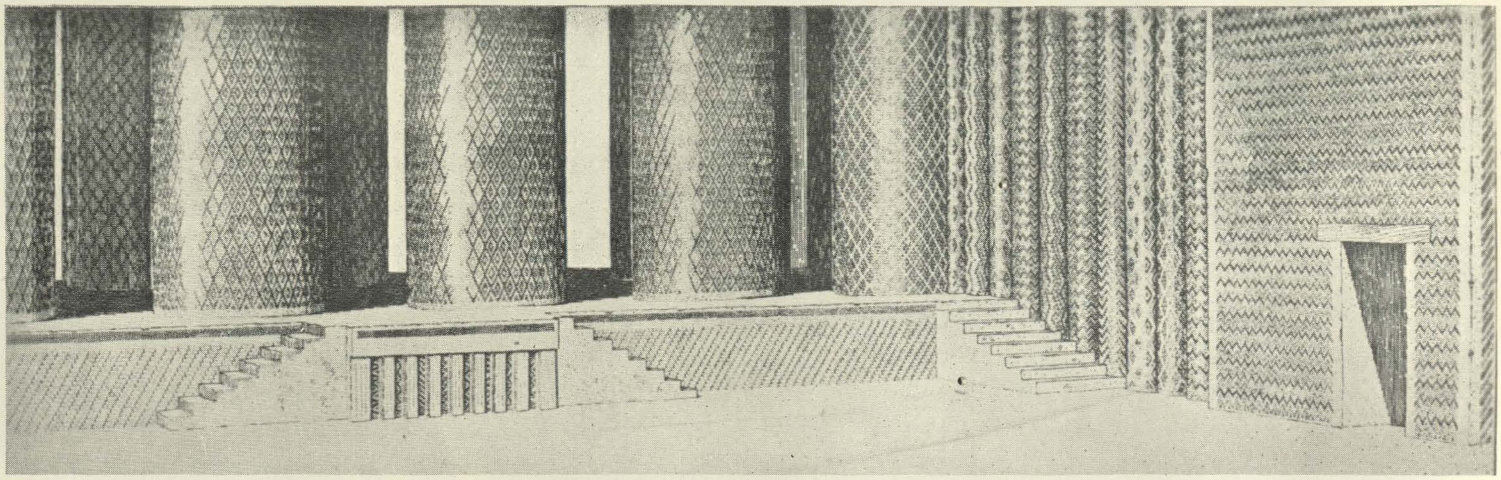
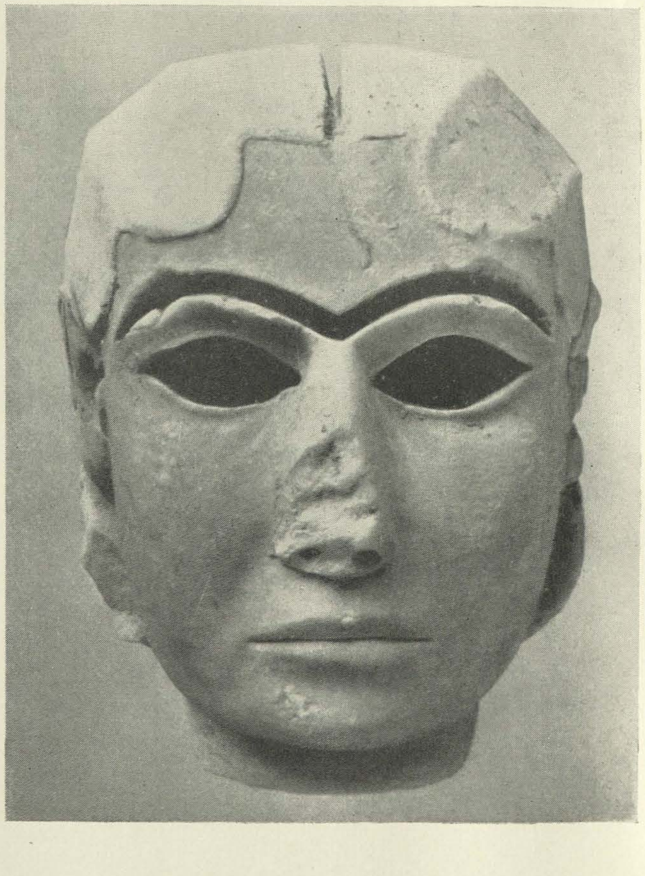


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Fig. 10—*Another innovation of this period was the earliest sculpture in stone. Here is an example of relief carving—a large votive vase made of limestone and decorated with friezes of figures*



Fig. 11—*A limestone head, a real masterpiece which illustrates the high artistic standard attained by the sculptor of Uruk even at this early date*



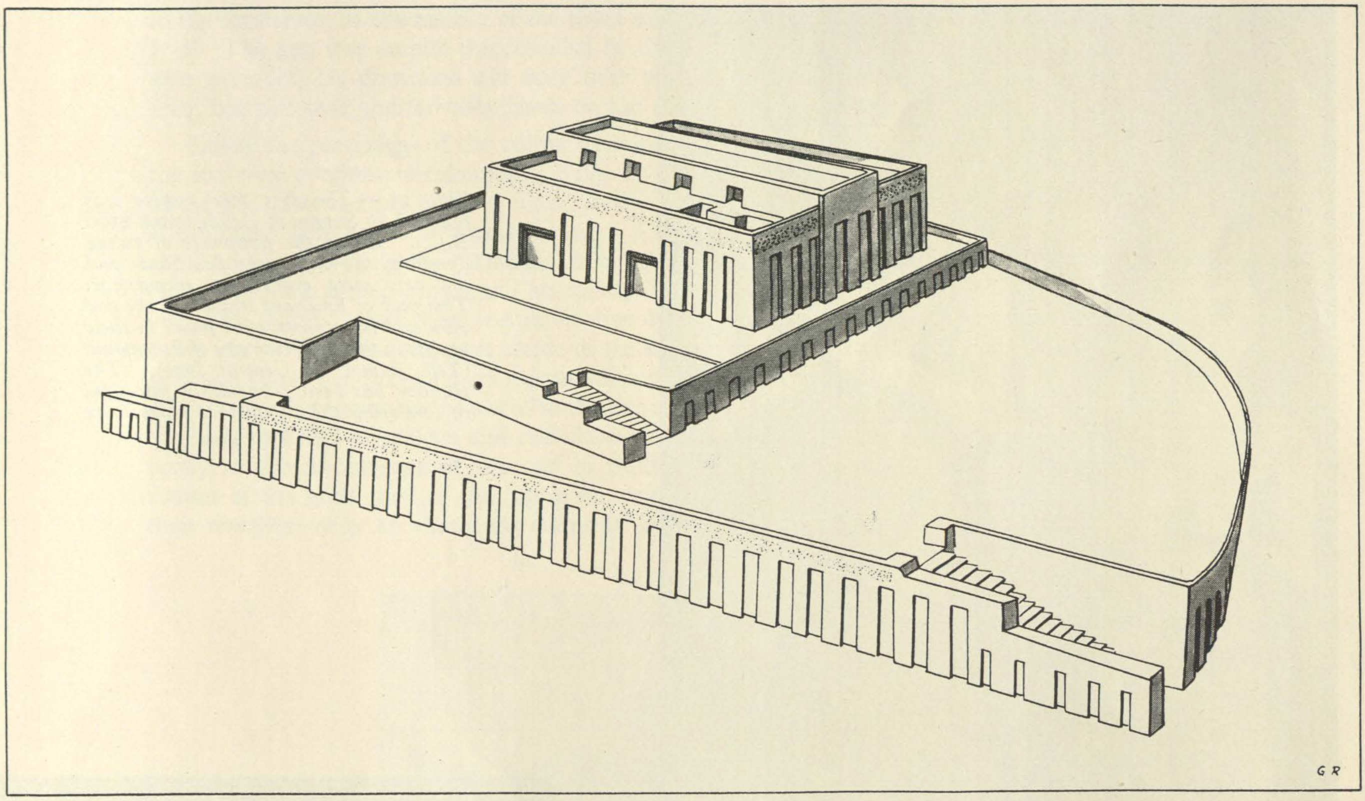


Fig. 12—*This temple of sun-dried brick, skilfully worked on the outside into ornamental façades of alternating buttresses and recesses, was unearthed at Tell Uqair, 50 miles south of Baghdad*
From an original drawing by Dr. Georges Roux

that suggest those of a modern Persian carpet. Another innovation of this period was the earliest sculpture in stone. In *Fig.* 10 we have an example of relief carving—a large votive vase made of limestone and decorated with friezes of figures bearing offerings to the god, and in *Fig.* 11 a limestone head, a real masterpiece which demonstrates the high artistic standard attained by the sculptor of Uruk even at this early date. He is particularly successful in his modelling of the lines and surfaces of the cheeks and chin, giving an air of true nobility to the face of this Sumerian lady. The eyes and eyebrows were originally inlaid with precious stones and mother-of-pearl—a technique which we also find in later Sumerian statues.

In addition to the coloured cone mosaics already mentioned, the early Sumerians also enriched the beauty of their temples with brilliant frescoes. At Tell Uqair, 50 miles due south of Baghdad, was unearthed the temple shown in *Fig.* 12. It is built of sun-dried brick, skilfully worked on the outside into ornamental façades of alternating buttresses and recesses, and the interior decorated with coloured paintings of leopard and other figures.

II. SUMER AND AKKAD

By the beginning of the third millenium B.C. the villages of prehistoric times had grown into established towns, well organised politically, economically and socially. Each town was independent, under its own ruler, who was at first both the temporal head of the city-state and its high priest; but, in time, the two functions were separated, and the secular authority became hereditary in a royal family, whose kingship was believed to be descended from heaven. The city, with its surrounding villages, formed a small independent state, but the natural rivalry between these states led to struggles for pre-eminence, and



Fig. 13 — *The first true empire was founded by Sargon of Agade* (circa 2300 *B.C.*). *Under the patronage of ruling dynasties the city-states flourished, and the arts were everywhere encouraged. This pair of limestone statues, of the god Abu and his consort, were found in their temple in the Sumerian city of Esh-nunna (Tell Asmar in Central Iraq). The sculptor has been particularly successful in conveying the patriarchal benevolence of Abu . . .*



Fig. 14 . . . *But there was more than one school of Sumerian sculpture, as can be seen from this alabaster statue of the same period, whose softer lines and better perspective mark a great advance towards a more lively rendering . . .*

to the formation, in the middle of the third millenium, of the first kingdoms in Iraq. The first true empire was founded by Sargon of Agade (*circa* 2300 B.C.), who extended his dominion not only over the other city-states of Southern Iraq, but also over the far-away lands on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Under the patronage of the ruling dynasties the city-states flourished, and the arts were everywhere encouraged. *Fig.* 13 shows a pair of limestone statues, of the god Abu and his consort, found in their temple in the Sumerian city of Esh-nunna (Tell Asmar in Central Iraq). The sculptor has been particularly successful in conveying the patriarchal benevolence of Abu, whose large circular eyes, with their arched brows, and his calmly folded hands give him an aspect of venerable dignity. But there was more than one school of Sumerian sculpture, as we can see from the alabaster statue of the same period (*Fig.* 14) whose softer lines and better perspective mark a great advance towards a more lively rendering. The same achievement can be traced in the two alabaster heads of calves (*Fig.* 15); the high standard of realism and execution in these two pieces can be ascribed partly to the importance of the calf in Sumerian religious beliefs. Portrait statues of the great men of the Sumerian cities were also placed to perpetuate their memory—*Fig.* 16 shows the statue of Dudu, minister and adviser at the

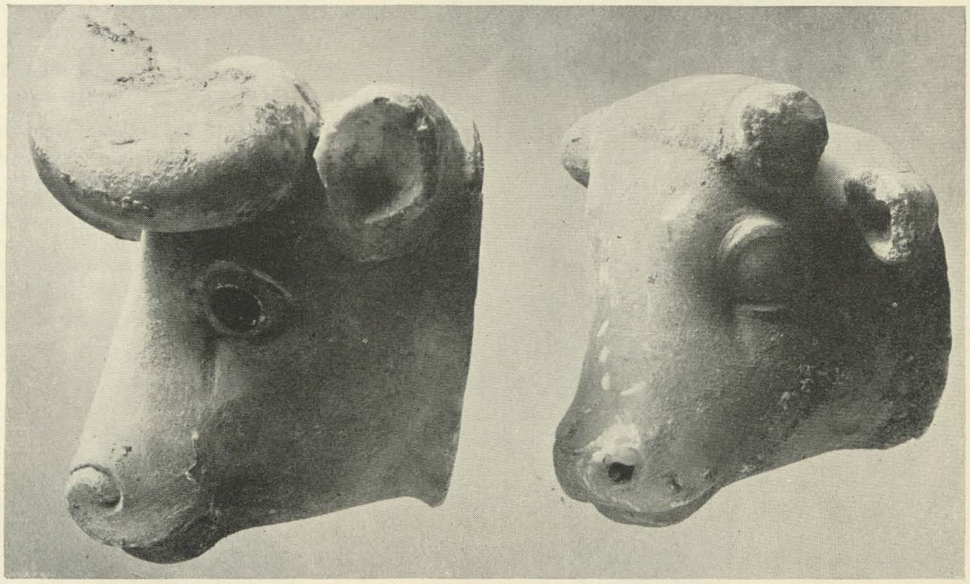


Fig. 15 . . . *and the same achievement is evident in the two alabaster heads of calves, in which the high standard of realism and execution can be ascribed partly to the importance of the calf in Sumerian religious beliefs*

royal court of Lagash about 2600 B.C.—and great events were recorded for posterity in pictures as well as written records. The stele of Eannatum, king of Lagash, commemorating his victory over the rival city of Umma (*Fig.* 17), depicts with great realism the advance of the Sumerian phalanx on the field of battle.

The daily life of the period also finds a place in its art. Although the working of copper and bronze did not reach its peak until the time of Sargon, a miniature chariot in copper (*Fig.* 18), dating from about 3000 B.C.. shows a high degree of craftsmanship, and is of special interest since it is the earliest representation we have of this vehicle, which later played such an important part in war and pageantry. Another copper miniature (*Fig.* 19) depicts two Sumerians wrestling, each with a jar over his head, either as a test of skill or as a piece of simple buffoonery. Another, more conventional, wrestling scene appears in relief on a stone plaque (*Fig.* 20).

It was at Ur of the Chaldees that ten years of patient excavation produced our most outstanding discoveries of this period, and the Royal Tombs of this city are the source of much of our knowledge of Sumerian civilisation about



Fig. 16—*Portrait statues of the great men of the Sumerian cities perpetuated their memory. This is a statue of Dudu, minister and adviser at the royal court of Lagash about 2600 B.C.*

Fig. 17—*Great events were recorded for posterity in pictures as well as in writing. The stele of Eannatum, king of Lagash, commemorating his victory over the rival city of Umma, depicts with great realism the advance of the Sumerian phalanx on the field of battle*

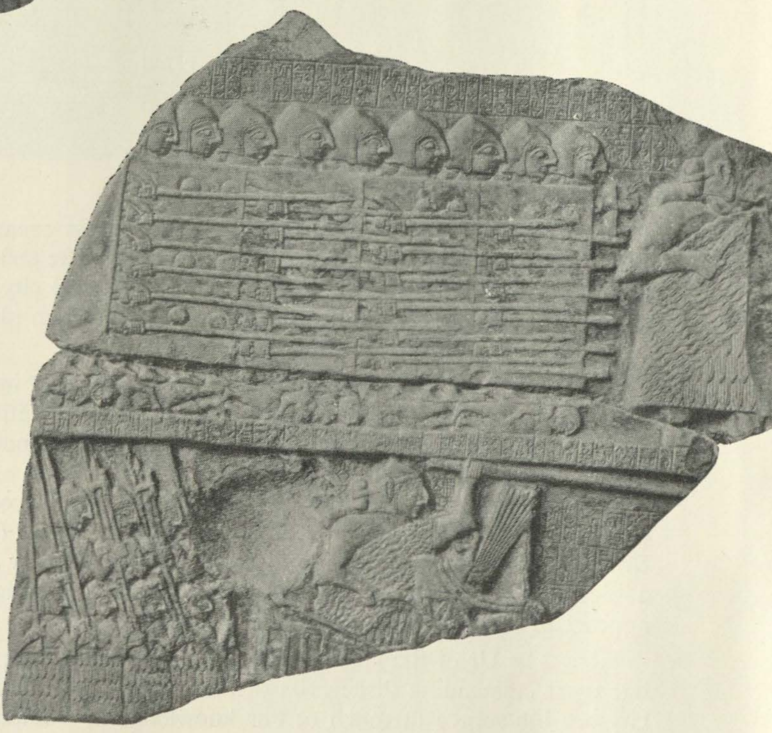




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2600 B.C. Each tomb took the form of a chamber built in brick or limestone, in which were placed the furniture and the most valuable possessions of the dead person. We can only illustrate here a few of the treasures discovered in these tombs. *Fig.* 21 shows a harp, remarkable for its craftsmanship and especially interesting as the earliest example of a comparatively highly developed musical instrument. *Fig.* 22 gives some idea of the wealth of personal jewellery, with a head-dress and necklaces of gold, lapis lazuli and carnelian, reset and mounted on a wooden model made for the purpose in the Iraq Museum. In *Fig.* 23 are daggers decorated with exquisite filigree ornament.

The civilisation that flourished at the beginning of the third millenium is the sudden flowering of a growth whose roots can be traced back to the early life and environment of the country. One of the developments which formed



Fig. 19—*Another copper miniature depicts two Sumerians wrestling, each with a jar over his head, either as a test of skill or as a piece of simple buffoonery*



Fig. 20—*On this stone plaque a wrestling scene depicted in relief is somewhat more conventional than that shown on the previous page*

part of, and in large measure made possible, this great expansion was the emergence of a standard cuneiform script, whose development from earlier pictorial writing we have already touched upon. The widespread adoption of this script, in which all forms of knowledge were recorded and propagated, obviously also had its effect on economy and society. We find that a strong feeling towards private property is a marked characteristic of the Sumerians; it was probably one of the factors that contributed to the first codifications of law, of which we have examples dating from about 2000 B.C.

Herodotus tells us that in his time each Babylonian had his private cylinder seal, with which he signed his documents by rolling it across the bottom of the clay tablet while it was still wet. This custom was of great antiquity, and we have many examples of seals of the Sumerian and later periods, of which two examples are illustrated in *Fig.* 24. Many of them were engraved with religious scenes and ceremonies, without any inscription; the seal on the left of the photograph shows an episode from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, while the one on the right depicts a ruler before Shamash, the Sun God of Babylon.

Materially and morally this civilisation established many of the institutions that we know in modern society, including the forerunner of Parliaments, in the form of a Privy Council chosen from the elders and leading men in the various communities. The ruler himself was given a careful upbringing and education; Gudea, a famous prince of the Sumerian city of Lagash, was a great writer in addition to his achievements as soldier and builder, and the texts he has left us show evidence of refined literary taste as well as of vivid and felicitous invention. In *Fig.* 25 is one of several known statues of Gudea; they are usually of diorite, very well executed, and represent him in his various official capacities.

Architecture also had its great achievements. By the end of the third millenium each city had a staged tower, or ziggurat, usually built of mud brick with an outer casing of burnt brick. The ziggurat of Ur (*Fig.* 26) had three stages, the lowest of them about 60 metres square; on the topmost platform, about 60 metres above the ground, was a small shrine, the abode of Sin, the Moon God, the chief deity of the city.

Perhaps one of the most surprising features of Sumerian civilisation is that it attained such a high level within such a comparatively small society; but there is no doubt that the rise of the Akkadian Empire about 2300 B.C. brought



Fig. 21—*An artist's impression, checked for accuracy, of one of the two magnificent harps of Ur of the Chaldees. Discovered in 1926 by C. L. Woolley while excavating the Royal Tombs in the Ur ruins, one of them is now preserved in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. It dates from about 2600 B.C. Along with male guards and female attendants, accoutrements and personal belongings, it was buried with a man, Abargi, and a woman, Shubad, now presumed to be king and queen. "Among the bodies," writes Seton Lloyd in his* Foundations in the Dust, *" lay many striking objects, such as two enormous harps heavily inlaid and decorated with bulls' heads in gold and lapis." These remains, remarkably well preserved in their sealed tomb, provided evidence not only of one of the ritual burials of those times but also, and of more importance, of the fashions and manner of living*



Fig. 22—*This wooden model, made for the purpose, which is in the Iraq Museum, is adorned with a wealth of personal jewellery typical of the period* circa 2600 *B.C.—a head-dress and necklaces of gold, lapis lazuli and carnelian*

new inspiration. The Akkadians appear in the history of Iraq long before they achieved unity and power under Sargon; and, after him, there were their records, inscribed in their own Akkadian language, which, being semitic, has so many things in common with Arabic. Their records have been found in many places in Iraq and even as far afield as Asia Minor, where they established outposts to control the trade routes and administer their far-flung empire. The stele depicted in *Fig.* 27 shows Naram-Sin, king of Agade, standing victorious over his enemies in the northern mountains, and the vivid realism and vigour of this carving are indeed the qualities of Naram-Sin and his age, for the Akkadians were great builders and organisers. Their achievements are often overshadowed by those of the later Mesopotamian empires for whom they paved the way; but it is fitting to close this brief survey of the transition from city-state to empire with a portrait, *Fig.* 28, which probably represents Sargon himself, and may be the work of a contemporary artist. It was unearthed in the early building levels at Nineveh, which was at that time under the rule of Agade, and is a superb example of the bronze-smith's art—perhaps the finest piece that has come down to us from the age whose greatest man was Sargon.



Fig. 23—*Daggers of the period* (circa 2,600 *B.C.*) *decorated with exquisite filigree ornament*

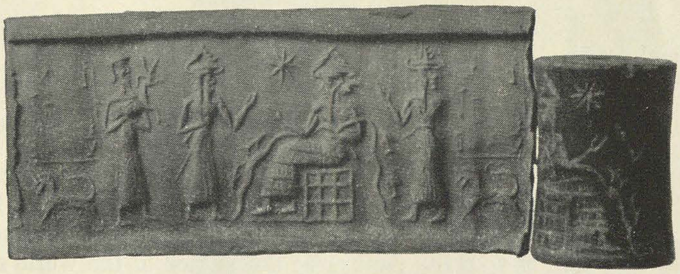


Fig. 24—*Examples of private cylinder seals with which Babylonians signed their documents by rolling them across the bottoms of clay tablets while they were still wet*





Fig. 25—*Gudea, a famous prince of the Sumerian city of Lagash, was a great writer in addition to his achievements as soldier and builder, and the texts he has left us show evidence of refined literary taste as well of vivid and felicitous invention. This is one of several known statues of Gudea ; they are usually of diorite, very well executed, and represent him in his various official capacities*

III. BABYLONIA AND ASSYRIA

At the close of the third millenium B.C. the Amorites, a Semitic tribe, began to infiltrate into the Middle Euphrates region and, after two centuries, became the undisputed rulers of Iraq, during the reign of Hammurabi, who is famous as the author of the world's earliest surviving legal code. In *Fig.* 29 he is seen standing before Shamash, in his capacity as God of Justice, at the top of a diorite stele on which are inscribed the 282 laws of his code. A number of copies of this code were made, of which one was placed in the temple of Shamash in Babylon, Hammurabi's capital. Other yet earlier codes are known to have existed, but none has as yet been recovered intact ; two tablets bearing the text of laws ascribed to Belilama, who reigned some 200 years before Hammurabi, were found at Tell Harmal, a small mound on the outskirts of Baghdad. The codification of law marks the culmination of a long process of social development, and implies that the rights and duties of the individual in his public and private relationships had become so complex that they must be regulated by independent canon ; custom and tradition, although they were no doubt embodied in the written laws, were no longer sufficient.

Hammurabi's initiative was also exercised in other directions, and the great irrigation systems that are the arteries of life in Southern Iraq owe much to his organising genius. The benefits of irrigation had been known long before, in the prehistoric period, but a strong central authority was needed to co-ordinate



Fig. 26—*By the end of the third millenium each city had a staged tower, or ziggurat, usually built of mud brick with an outer casing of burnt brick. The ziggurat of Ur, above, had three stages, the lowest of them about 60 metres square ; on the topmost platform, about 60 metres above the ground, was a small shrine, the abode of Sin, the Moon God, the chief deity of the city*

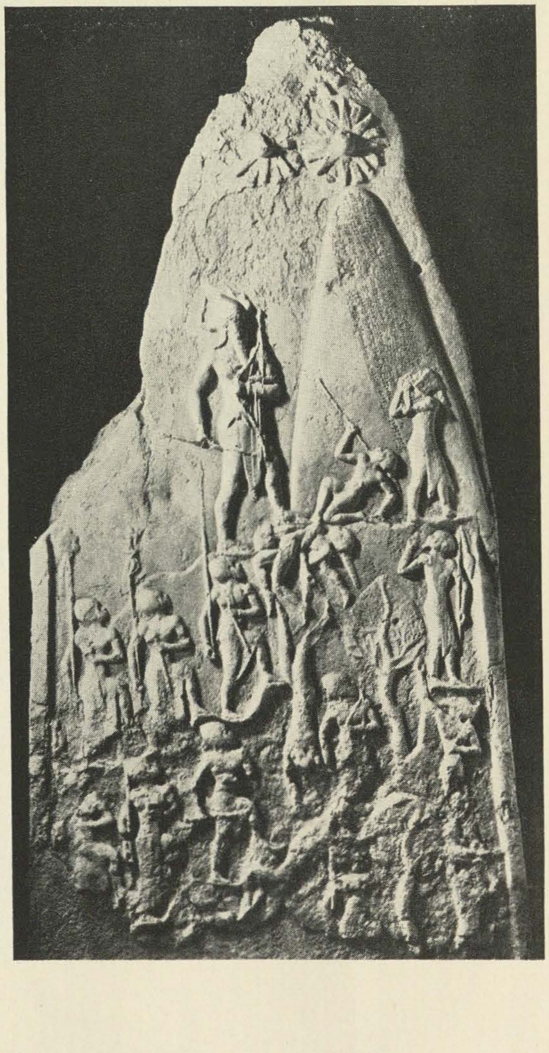


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Fig. 28—*This portrait probably represents Sargon himself, and may be the work of a contemporary artist. It was unearthed in the early building levels of Nineveh, which was at that time under the rule of Agade, and is a superb example of the bronze-smith's art—perhaps the finest piece that has come down to us from the age whose greatest man was Sargon*

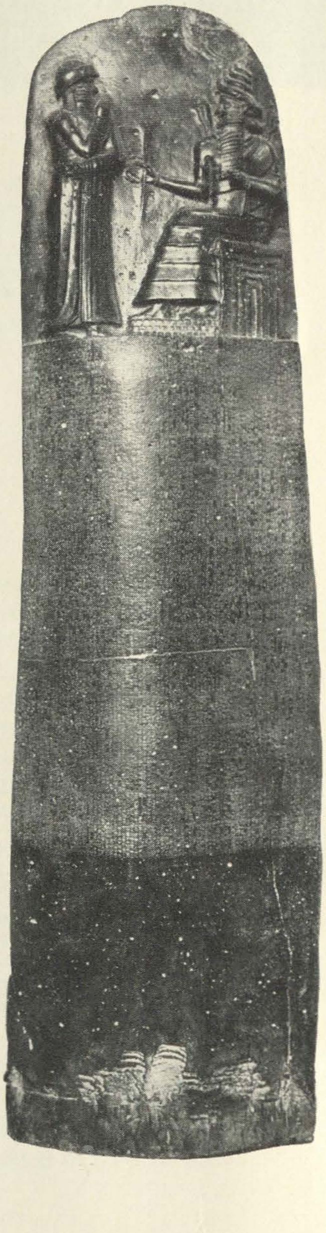


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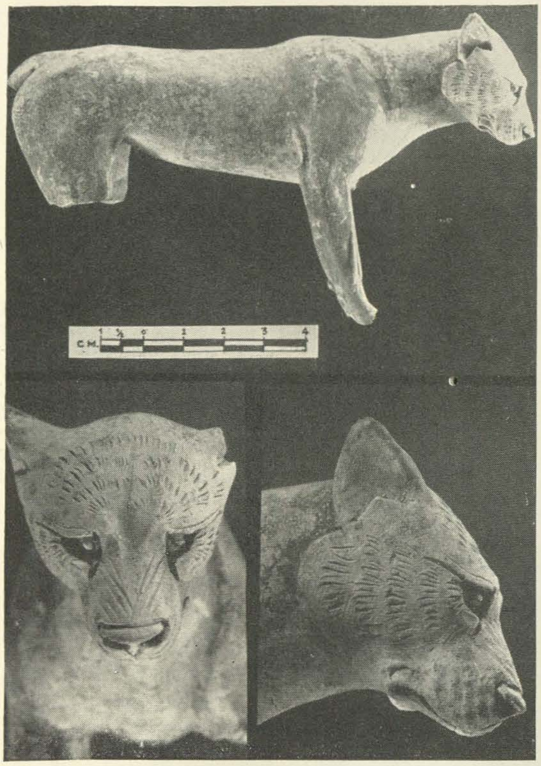


Fig. 30—*At the end of the 17th Century B.C., Babylon came under the domination of the Kassites, who ruled Southern Iraq for five centuries. The excavation of Aqarquf revealed many new aspects of Kassite history and culture : it was a period of intermingling of cultures and produced many remarkable works of art of which a lioness, sculptured in clay, which was discovered in the palace at Aqarquf, may serve as an example*

Fig. 31—*During the first centuries of the second millenium B.C., Northern Iraq saw the rise of a new power—the Assyrians, who had spread across the plains of Mosul during the third millenium. From the 18th Century B.C. onward they achieved local dominance on several occasions, and from the 13th Century B.C. they rivalled Babylon and Egypt as the masters of the Middle East. As a people they were good administrators and excellent fighting men. This is a mail breast-plate worn by an Assyrian soldier about 1800 B.C.*





Fig. 32—*One of the first and greatest kings of the Assyrian line was Assur-nasir-pal II, who built himself a military capital at Nimrud, 20 miles south of Mosul on the east bank of the Tigris, and fortified it with a citadel and towered city wall*

the building and maintenance of canals to bring water to the fields, and of dams and dykes to protect them against disastrous floods.

At the end of the 17th Century B.C., Babylon came under the domination of a new people, the Kassites, who ruled Southern Iraq for five centuries. One of their kings in the 14th Century founded a new capital, called after himself, Dur-kuri-kalzu, the city of Kuri-Kalzu. It is now known as Aqarquf, and lies some 12 miles due west of Baghdad, where the ruins of its ziggurat have been for centuries a prominent landmark for travellers approaching the capital along the great desert road. The excavation of Aqarquf revealed many new aspects of Kassite history and culture, and conveyed the wide range of its contacts all over the Middle East, and especially between Southern Iraq and Egypt. It was a period of intermingling of cultures, and produced many remarkable works of art, of which a lioness, sculptured in clay, *Fig.* 30, which was discovered in the palace at Aqarquf, may serve as an example.

During the first centuries of the second millenium Northern Iraq also saw the rise of a new power. The Assyrians, who had spread across the plains of Mosul in the third millenium, were gradually unified under the banner of Assur, their chief god, who also gave his name to their first capital on the Tigris 60 miles south of Mosul. In their early days they came from time to time under the rules of Sumer and Akkad, and later under Hammurabi of Babylon, whose kingdom embraced all Mesopotamia ; but from the 18th Century B.C. onward they achieved local dominance on several occasions, and from the 13th Century B.C. they rivalled Babylon and Egypt as the masters of the Middle East. As a people they were good administrators and excellent fighting men—*Fig.* 31

Fig. 33—*Assur-nasir-pal II tells us in a stele (right) erected in the courtyard of his palace at Nimrud, that he built this city, Calah, with the labour of his prisoners-of-war, and that on the completion of the work he made a royal banquet of celebration for all the inhabitants of the new city, 64,000 in number, and 5,000 distinguished guests from the farther parts of his empire. At the top of the stele we see the king himself with, over his head, the symbols of the great gods of Assyria*



shows a mail breast-plate worn by an Assyrian soldier about 1300 B.C.—and they can perhaps be likened to the Romans, whereas the Sumerians and Babylonians were more closely akin in character to the Greeks ; and although, like the Romans, they at first copied much from their more cultured neighbours, their civilisation had a character all its own. Assur remained the tribal and religious capital of Assyria throughout her history, and her kings were buried there, but the centre of administration was more often the great city of Nineveh, at the crossing of the Tigris opposite Mosul. During her last and most splendid epoch, too, other capitals were built and occupied from time to



Fig. 34—*The throne room of the palace at Nimrud, over 45 metres long, had four entrances, of which the two opening on to the courtyard were flanked by pairs of colossal winged figures. The outer façade of this great hall was decorated with reliefs of which some are still in position. Here (left) is the king's chief minister followed by his attendant. These reliefs are unique in their execution, which is more refined than Assur-nasir-pal's usual vigorous style*



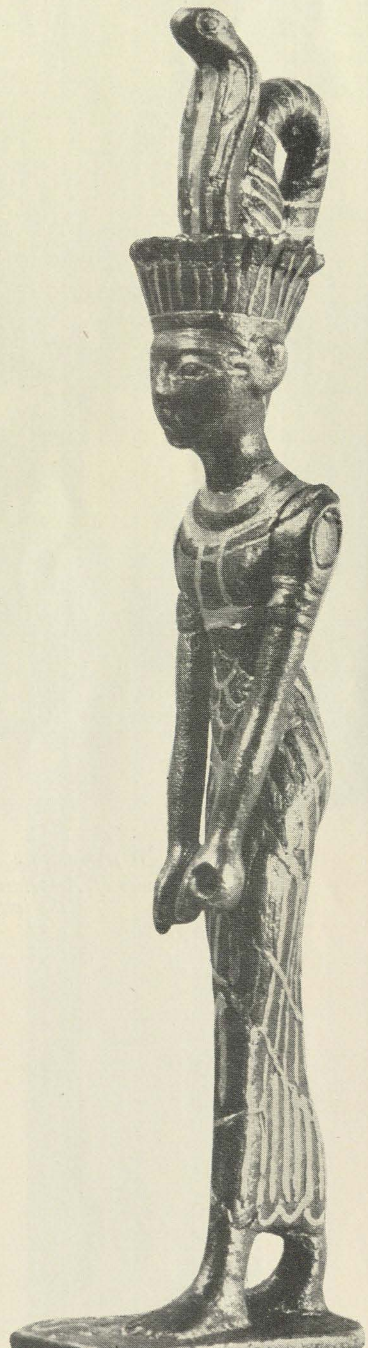
Fig. 35—*Sargon (left) was a great builder and raised a new capital at Khorsabad : it was a gigantic enterprise and included a large royal palace, temples and a spiral ziggurat as well as administrative buildings and houses for the nobility and commoners, but Sargon did not for long enjoy the results of his labours for he was assassinated by members of his own court in 705 B.C., one year after the completion of his new city*



Fig. 36—*One of the gates of Khorsabad flanked by two colossal statues of winged, human-headed bulls. These were placed at the entrances to cities and palaces to protect the occupants from their enemies. Behind each of these huge figures there usually stood a winged human figure bearing the symbols of fertility and prosperity in his hands*

time by the extraordinary succession of warlords who drove this small country to empire and, in three centuries, to exhaustion. One of the first and greatest of the line was Assur-nasir-pal II (884–59 B.C.), who built himself a new military capital at Nimrud, 20 miles south of Mosul on the east bank of the Tigris (*Fig.* 32) and fortified it with a citadel and towered city wall. He tells us in the stele, erected in the courtyard of his palace at Nimrud, that he built this city, Calah, with the labour of his prisoners-of-war, and that on the completion of the work he made a royal banquet of celebration for all the inhabitants of the new city, 64,000 in number, and 5,000 distinguished guests from the farther parts of his empire. At the top of the stele (*Fig.* 33) we see the king himself with, over his head, the symbols of the great gods of Assyria. In his palace at Calah were found also more than 150 marble slabs with reliefs depicting, and inscriptions describing, the great achievements of Assur-nasir-pal. The throne-room of the palace, over 45 metres long, had four entrances, of which the two opening on to the courtyard were flanked with pairs of colossal winged figures. The outer façade of this great hall was decorated with reliefs, of which some are still in position; *Fig.* 34 shows the king's chief minister followed by his attendant. These reliefs are unique in their execution, which is more refined than Assur-nasir-pal's usual vigorous style.

Fig. 37—*A fine bronze statuette, one of the trophies of Esarhaddon from his Egyptian conquests, found at Nineveh*



Another great builder was Sargon, who is known from the Bible for his successful campaign against Israel which culminated in the destruction of the Israelite capital, Samaria. He built for himself a new capital at Khorsabad, ten miles north-east of Mosul, which he called Dur-Sharrukin, "the city of Sargon." It was a gigantic enterprise, including a large royal palace, temples and a spiral ziggurat as well as administrative buildings and houses for the nobility and commoners, but Sargon (*Fig.* 35) did not enjoy for long the results of his labours, since he was assassinated by members of his own court in 705 B.C., one year after the completion of his new city. Dur-Sharrukin was abandoned for ever at the death of its founder, whose successor, Sennacherib, took up his residence at Nineveh which he re-fortified and embellished with numerous marble reliefs and sculptures. He also made green the surrounding fields by bringing water from the river Gomel through a rock-cut canal which diverted it, at the point where it emerges from the mountains north-east of the city, into the bed of the river Khosr, the stream that still flows through the ruins of Nineveh. One of the city gates, the North Gate or Gate of Nergal, is at present in course of restoration. It was flanked by two colossal statues of winged, human-headed bulls, which were placed at the entrances to cities and palaces to protect the occupants from their enemies; behind each of these huge figures there usually stood a winged human figure, or guardian angel, bearing the symbols of fertility and prosperity in his hands—as is clear in *Fig.* 36, one of the Gates at Khorsabad.

At Nineveh other kings besides Sennacherib have left their mark. His son, Esarhaddon, built a palace in the south-west quarter of the city on the mound now known as Nebi Yunus, and here he deposited a great many of the trophies of his Egyptian conquests. It has only recently become possible to conduct excavations at Nebi Yunus, but the richness of the finds made in the small area so far uncovered augurs well for the future. Three large statues of Taharqa, Pharaoh of Egypt, were found at the entrance of the palace, together with a number of small objects such as the fine bronze statuette illustrated in *Fig.* 37 identified by an inscription on its base as the Egyptian goddess Anukit.

Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. before a concerted onslaught by the Babylonians from the south and their barbarian allies, the Medes, from beyond the Zagros Mountains, and Babylon regained for a brief period her lost supremacy.

In the last quarter of the 6th Century B.C. she had come under the control of a new dynasty; the Chaldaeans from the shores of the Gulf and, at the time of the destruction of Assyria, was ruled by Nabopolassar, with his famous



Fig. 38—" *Babylon became a great city beyond the grandiose dreams even of Assyrian monarchs.*" *Here are the ruins of the imposing Ishtar Gate*

son Nebuchadnezzar commanding the Babylonian armies in the field. The Egyptians too had come, belatedly, to dispose of the remains of the Assyrian Empire, but Nebuchadnezzar met and routed them at Carchemish on the Euphrates and proceeded thence to the conquest of Syria and Palestine. On the borders of Egypt he received the news of his father's death and his own accession to the throne, and there began what has justly been called one of the most brilliant reigns in history. Nebuchadnezzar was a great general whose iron hand was felt as far as the Phoenician cities of the coast; he twice sacked Jerusalem, and the wholesale deportation of the Jews after their second revolt is famous as the captivity by the waters of Babylon. But in his inscriptions he prefers to record his peaceful achievements, and many cities of the period in Southern Iraq have produced his characteristic bricks, telling of the construction or restoration of some temple or public building by the king's munificence. Babylon itself became a great city beyond the grandiose dreams even of

Assyrian monarchs. The temples of the old gods were rebuilt in the southern quarter of the town, and from them a magnificent processional way led through the imposing Ishtar Gate to the royal palace beyond, and flanked on both sides by fortresses ornamented with animals in relief. *Fig.* 38 shows the ruins of this gate. Overlooking the whole was the great ziggurat, and the terraced gardens of the palace which were counted by the Greeks among the Seven Wonders of the World. The whole was enclosed by inner and outer walls of great strength and vast extent, and further protected on the north by a fortification, later known as the Median Wall, which ran from the Tigris to the Euphrates.

This fabulous metropolis was a centre of wealth and cultured patronage of literature and the arts, and its learning was a byword—even in Europe in later times the Chaldaeans were proverbial for their knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. But after the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C. this devotion to the pursuits of peace took second place to the arts of administration and of war, and when his royal line died out a few years later, Nabonidus, a peace-loving antiquary and scholar, succeeded to his throne. The reign of Nabonidus, sympathetic figure though he was, marked the last decline of Babylon, and it was his son Belshazzar, as Prince Regent of the empire, who saw the " writing in the wall." In 539 B.C., Cyrus the Achamenian set his armies to divert the waters of the Euphrates above the city and, while Babylon feasted, her empire fell.

IV. EAST AND WEST MEET IN IRAQ

Babylon retained its prominent position during the reign of Cyrus the Great and his successors of the Achaemenian dynasty, as the winter capital of the empire, which in its great days controlled all the Middle East to the borders of Libya, and even, in the time of Darius and his son Xerxes at the beginning of the 5th Century B.C., attempted the conquest of Greece.

An abortive attempt to overthrow the dynasty was made by Cyrus, the younger brother of the reigning king Artexerxes, at the end of the 5th Century B.C. ; he was assisted by a small body of Greek mercenaries, the story of whose march down the Euphrates and subsequent retreat up the Tigris and across Asia Minor to the Black Sea, is well known from the work of Xenophon, *The Anabsis*, which introduced the East to the West. The Greeks perhaps over-rated the importance of their small country and smaller armies in the eyes of the kings whose dominions extended from the Caspian to the Mediterranean, but Xenophon's account makes heroic reading, and he is particularly interesting in his description of Iraq as he saw it ; he mentions many places that can still be identified, including the site of Calah (Nimrud), the old Assyrian military capital, whose quay wall and ziggurat he saw on his right hand as he marched up the bank of the Tigris. He mentions, too, the deserted city of Nineveh, and says that it had a suburb, inhabited in his day, which he calls Mespila—perhaps the first mention in history of the city Mosul.

Fig. 39—*Nineveh has recently yielded a charming statue of Hermes, the Greek god of travellers*



The declining Achaemenian power was eventually overthrown by a Greek, Alexander the Great, in 331 B.C., in a battle called after the city of Arbela. The historian of Alexander admits that he used this name only because Arbela, the modern Erbil, would be a familiar name to his readers ; and from his description of Alexander's movements it is clear that the Macedonian army was following the age-old highway that is now the modern road from Mosul to Erbil, and that the field of battle was actually the plain of Keramlais, some 15 miles east of Mosul. The Achaemenian dynasty was overthrown, and Alexander proceeded to the conquest of the East as far as the Indus ; but the effort was too great, and he returned to Babylon in 323 only to die of a fever. The empire he had created could probably not have been held together even by his genius, and after his death it dissolved into a number of kingdoms under his leading generals. But Alexander's lasting greatness, apart from his ephemeral

military triumphs, depended on two concepts in which can be traced the influence both of his Greek upbringing and of his contact with the more ancient civilisations of the Near East. He envisaged a state in which every citizen, whatever his race, should have equal rights, and a culture in which Eastern and Western traits could be combined in the way best suited to the tastes and needs of each locality.

The Macedonian power in Iraq survived, with increasing difficulty, for nearly two centuries, until the dynasty of Seleucus, one of Alexander's generals, who was expelled about 120 B.C. by the family of Arsaces, who founded the Parthian Empire. Their organisation and culture, as we can observe it after the establishment of their empire in Iraq, was a mixture of the old social system as it had existed under the Achaemenians, with the new Hellenistic settlers and their influence, absorbed and preserved without distinction of race. We find cities, whose population and organisation were largely Greek, surviving and prospering under the new regime; Seleucia on the Tigris, named after the founder of the Seleucid dynasty, took the place of Babylon and remained throughout the Parthian period a great commercial city on the road to the Gulf and India, and its wealth is attested by the high skill of its artists and sculptors. Nineveh had a Greek mayor in the 1st Century A.D., and has recently yielded a charming statue of Hermes (*Fig.* 39), the Greek god of travellers, which was set up in a small temple close to the crossing of the Tigris. But these settlements were commercial emporia, wisely tolerated and given a degree of local independence by the Parthian monarchs. Their traditional title, King of Kings, indicates that they were the imperial sovereigns of many petty states and princelings from the Euphrates to the Hindu Kush; and countless sites in Iraq, great and small, bear witness to the prosperity of the country under their rule.

Erbil itself was the seat of one of these autonomous states, Adiabeni, which controlled the regions to the east of the Tigris, from the Lower Zab to the Zagros Mountains. Assur, the old capital of Assyria, was a larger city at this time than ever before. Excavation in another Assyrian city across the Tigris, Kakzu, revealed Parthian tombs with their characteristic 'slipper' coffins (*Fig.* 40) of glazed earthenware, and a wealth of jewellery indicating the prosperity of this comparatively small place. During Parthian times (146 B.C.–226 A.D.) the Aramaic language was the *inter lingua* and the medium of international correspondence in almost all Near Eastern countries. The Aramaeans, whose original home was Arabia, first appeared in Iraq at the close of the second millenium B.C. They were an industrious, cultured race whose interest was mostly in trade and economical enterprise. Their easy

Fig. 40—*A characteristic "slipper" coffin from Parthian tombs excavated at Kakzu*

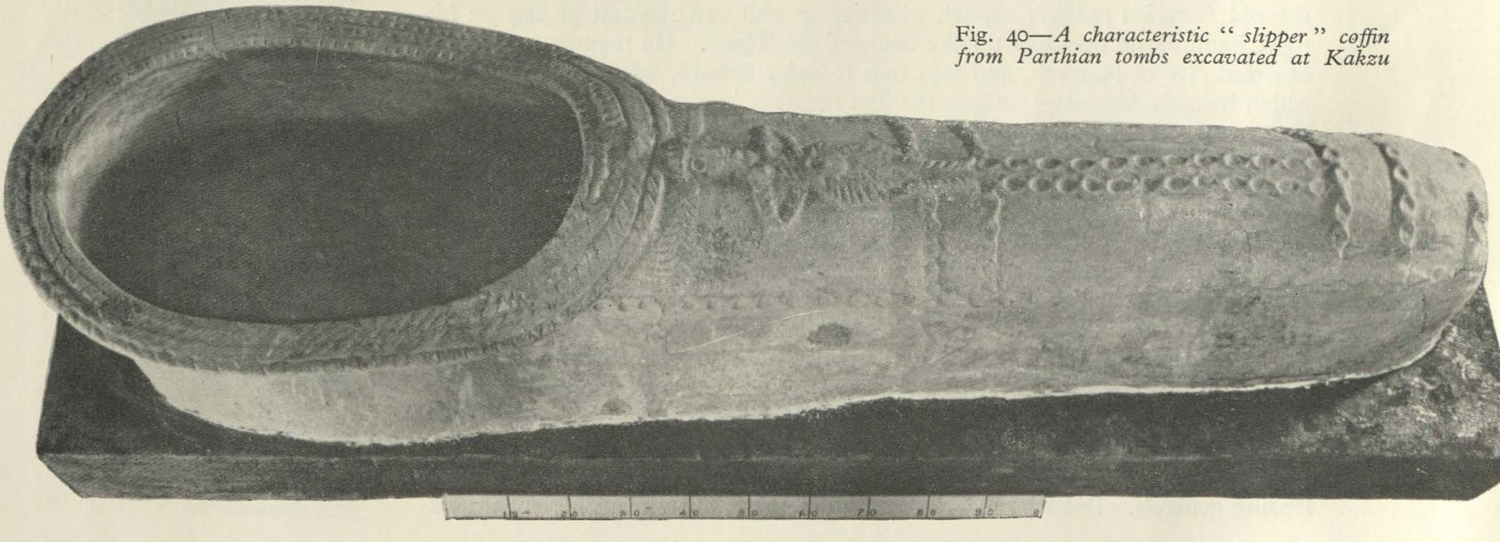




Fig. 41—*Hatra, some 550 acres in extent, had as central feature great vaulted stone temples whose façade is illustrated here; it remains one of the most impressive monuments of its period in the Middle East*

Fig. 42—*Around the Great Temple, and in other parts of Hatra, many small temples of unique design have been found and they have revealed magnificent statuary and small objects*





Fig. 43—*Among the statues found at Hatra was (left) a life-size representation of Sanatruq, a dominating figure expressing the power and royal dignity of this man whose name passed into Arab legend as the great king of the desert fortress*



Fig. 44—*The magnificence of his court is shown in the elaborately gowned figure of the princess Washfari, his daughter (right), with her rich embroideries and wealth of jewellery*



Fig. 45—*But we are reminded by the military bearing of one of the army commanders (left) that there was a sterner side to the life of Hatra, and . . .*



Fig. 46 . . . *by the calm presence of Bedda, the priest (right), of its religious importance*

alphabetic writing displaced gradually the cumbersome cuneiform and helped to spread the Aramaic culture.

We know that the Parthians established their winter capital at Ctesiphon, opposite Seleucia on the east bank of the Tigris, but their settlement there has been overlaid by the more magnificent buildings of a later dynasty, and it is to the recent excavations, undertaken by the Directorate-General of Antiquities of the Iraq Government at the old provincial capital of Hatra, that we must turn for our best illustrations of the life and art of the Parthian period. The ruins of Hatra lie on the west bank of the Wadi Tharthar, some 30 miles west of the Tigris and 60 miles south-west of Mosul. The city was founded about the middle of the 1st Century A.D., at the time when Roman pressure was increasing on Parthia's western frontier, and its strategic position and tactical strength were obviously designed to meet this growing threat; it did in fact successfully resist sieges by two of Rome's greatest soldier emperors, Trajan and Septimius Severus. But it was also a great religious centre, and the wealth of its temples was a legend even in ancient times. It appears to have been built to serve this double purpose by its great Arab ruler, Sanatruq. The Province of Hatra, which extended from the Sinjar mountain to the approaches of Ctesiphon and bounded east and west by the two rivers, was known by the name Arabia, indicating that it was inhabited by Arabs. Hatra was some 550 acres in extent, and was surrounded by a stone wall and ditch, strengthened by nearly 150 towers. Its central feature, the great vaulted stone temples whose façade is illustrated in *Fig.* 41, remains one of the most impressive monuments of the period in the Middle East. Unlike the Hellenistic temples west of the Euphrates, their plan is based essentially on a bold use of locally developed architectural forms, principally the great open hall or iwan, and Barnanai, the designer, who was also chief mason and sculptor, came of a local family of architects, several of whose names are recorded in inscriptions in the building.

Around the Great Temple, and in other parts of the city, have been found many smaller temples of unique design (*Fig.* 42), which have yielded a wealth of



Fig. 47—*A relief depicting the Sun God and the eagle, bird of the firmament, invested with a military standard by virtue of its position as patron of the armies of Hatra*

Fig. 48—*An illustration of the continuity of earlier cults is the statue of the great Assyrian god, Assur-bel, flanked by the eagles of Hatra and with a very classical figure of Victory at his feet. This is perhaps the finest example of Hatrene sculpture so far brought to light and, as a piece of conscious design, has few rivals in the ancient world of its time*



Fig. 49—*The period from the defeat of Trajan in* 116 *A.D. to the invasion of Severus in* 197, *was the golden age of Hatra, and its period of peaceful prosperity is epitomised by this royal statue of King Uthal, who reigned probably towards the middle of the Century. Here the king is seen in court dress, bearing in his hands the symbols of civil authority ; his satisfied mien is in strong contrast to the rugged power of the old warrior, Sanatruq*

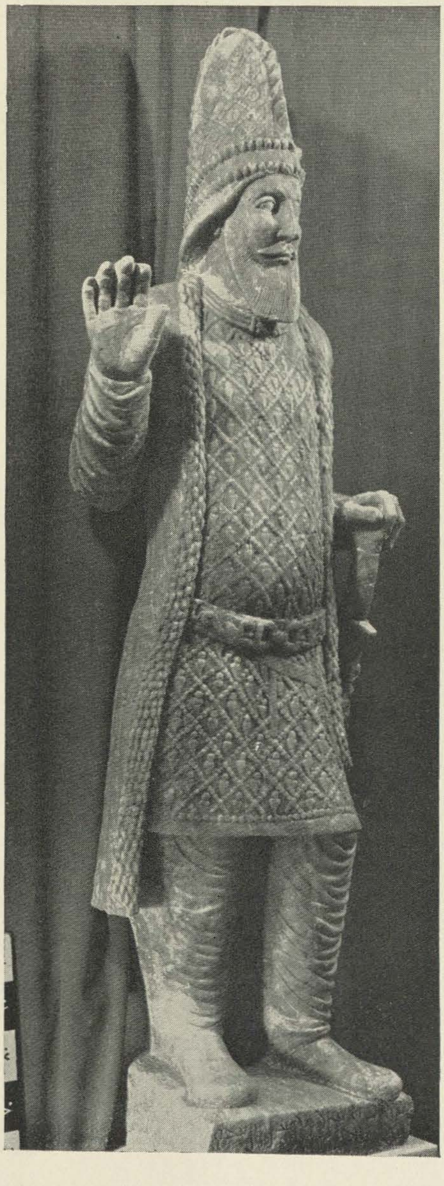


Fig. 50—*Sassanian achievements in art and architecture combined the traditions of the past and infused into them a spirit of magnificence. No better example can be found to illustrate their greatness than the royal palaces on the site of the old Parthian capital at Ctesiphon (opposite, above), built probably in the middle of the 6th Century A.D. when their power was at its height. This enormous structure, of which the main reception hall and one wing of the façade are still standing, is a triumph of architectural engineering—the great vault remains the largest span of unreinforced brickwork in the world*

Fig. 51—*The palace at Ctesiphon was originally richly decorated with moulded stucco ornament, of which some examples are reproduced in the picture opposite, and furnished with equal magnificence*





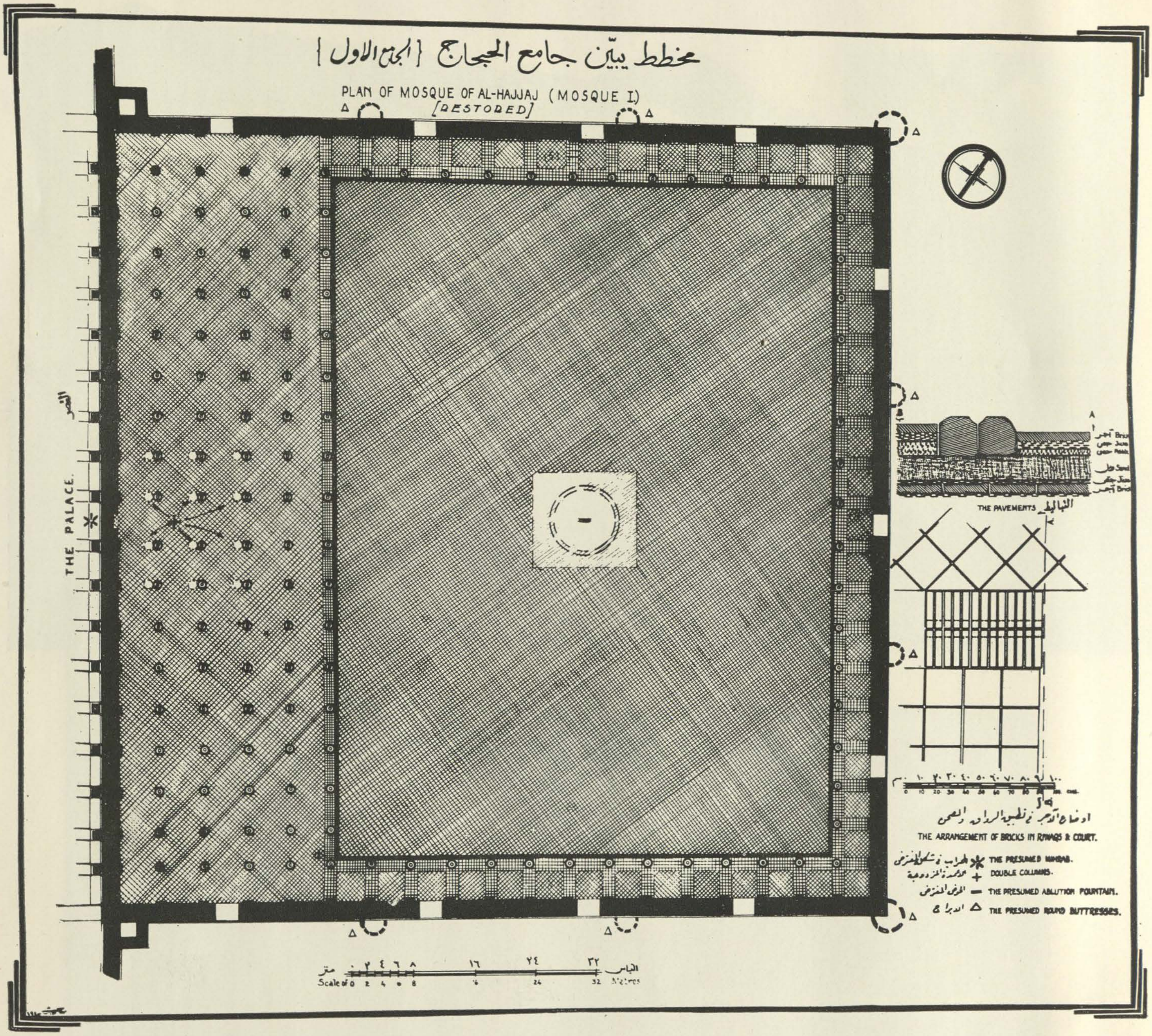


Fig. 52—*Ground plan of the mosque built by the Umayyid at Wasit at the beginning of the 8th Century A.D.*

magnificent statuary and small objects. *Fig.* 43 shows a life-size statue of the dominating figure of Sanatruq himself, expressing the power and royal dignity of this man whose name passed into Arab legend as the great king of the desert fortress. The magnificence of his court is shown in the elaborately gowned figure of the princess Washfari, his daughter (*Fig.* 44), with her rich embroideries and wealth of jewellery; but we are reminded by the military bearing of one of the army commanders (*Fig.* 45), that there was a sterner side to the life of Hatra, and by the calm presence of Bedda, the priest, (*Fig.* 46) of its religious importance. Indeed, much of the wealth of the city must have been derived directly or indirectly from the worshippers at its shrines, whose number and diversity is attested by an extraordinary variety of cults of Assyrian, Aramaean and Arab origin. Hatrene religion was largely concerned with the sun, the firmament and the heavenly bodies—a pre-occupation that can well



Fig. 53—*The early mosques combined in their style simplicity, grandeur and nobility. Above are the architectural remains, recently uncovered at Kufa, of the Dar-al-Imara which was built by Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas, the Commander-in-Chief of the Arab armies in Iraq*



Fig. 54—*Very few buildings of the Abbasid period have survived in Baghdad owing to its chequered history and the constant change and development inevitable in a capital city. The charming shrine (left) said to be the tomb of the wife of Harun al Rashid, Sitt Zubaida, is more likely to be of the late Abbasid period*

be understood by anyone who has experienced one of its blazing days or superb starlit nights. *Fig.* 47 shows a relief depicting the Sun God, and the eagle, bird of the firmament, invested with a military standard by virtue of its position as patron of the armies of Hatra ; and as an illustration of the continuity of earlier cults, we have the statue of the great Assyrian god, Assur-bel (*Fig.* 48), flanked by the the eagles of Hatra and with a very classical figure of Victory at his feet. This is perhaps the finest example of Hatrene sculpture so far brought to light and, as a piece of conscious design, has few rivals in the ancient world of its time. The period from the defeat of Trajan in A.D. 116 to the invasion of Severus in 197, to which this statue belongs, was in fact the golden age of Hatra, and its spirit of peaceful prosperity is epitomised by another royal

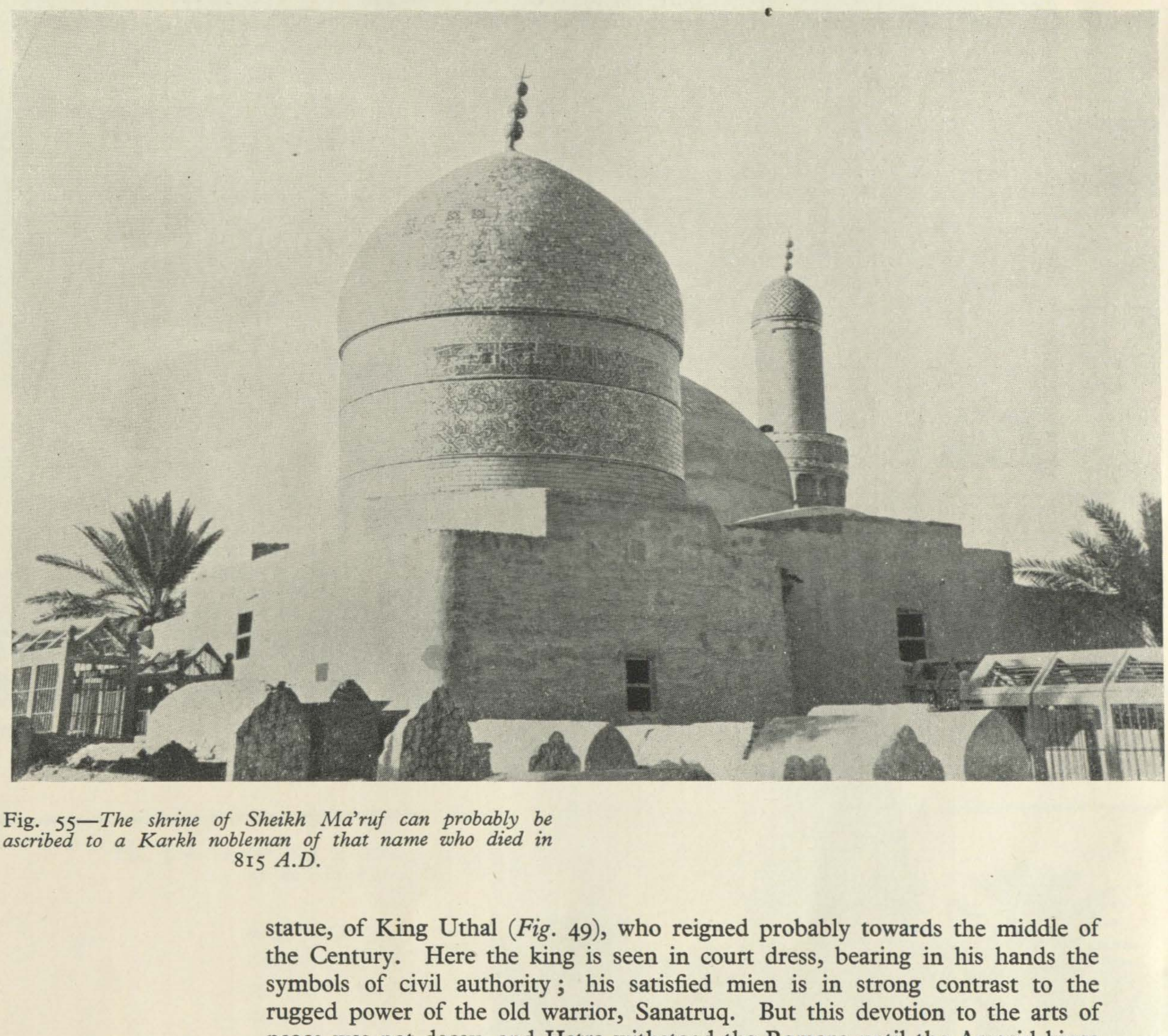
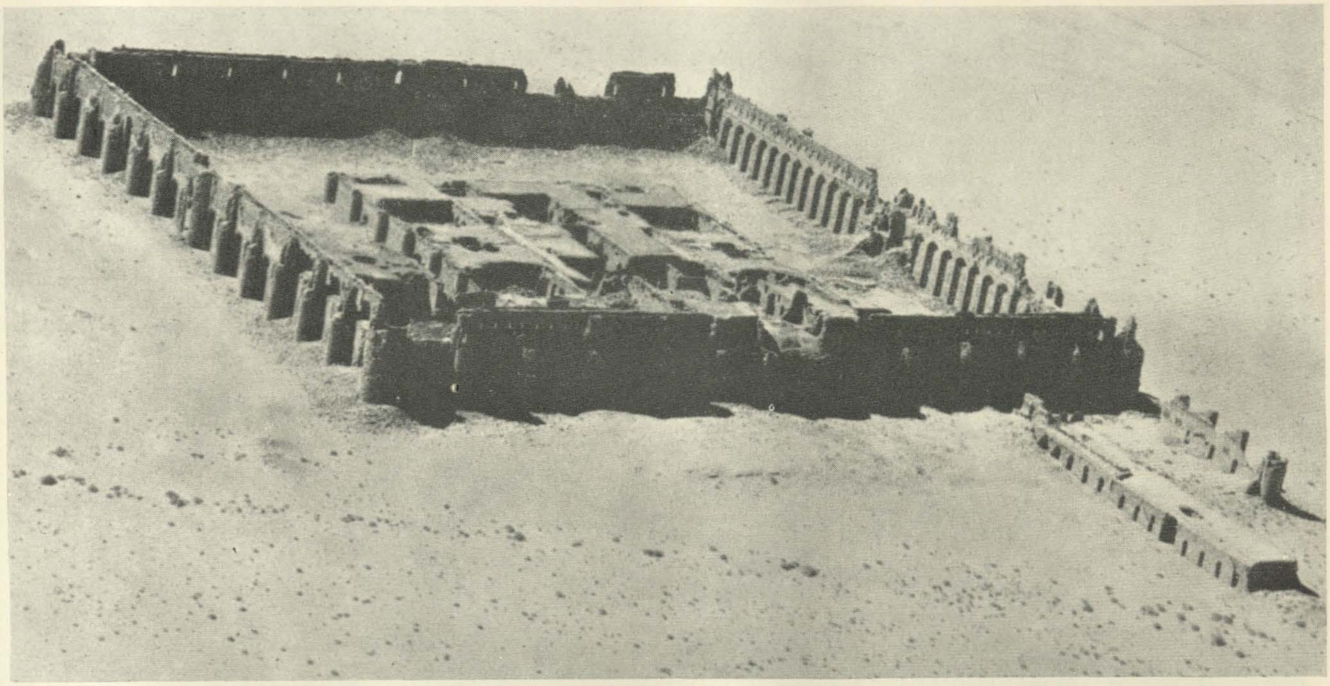
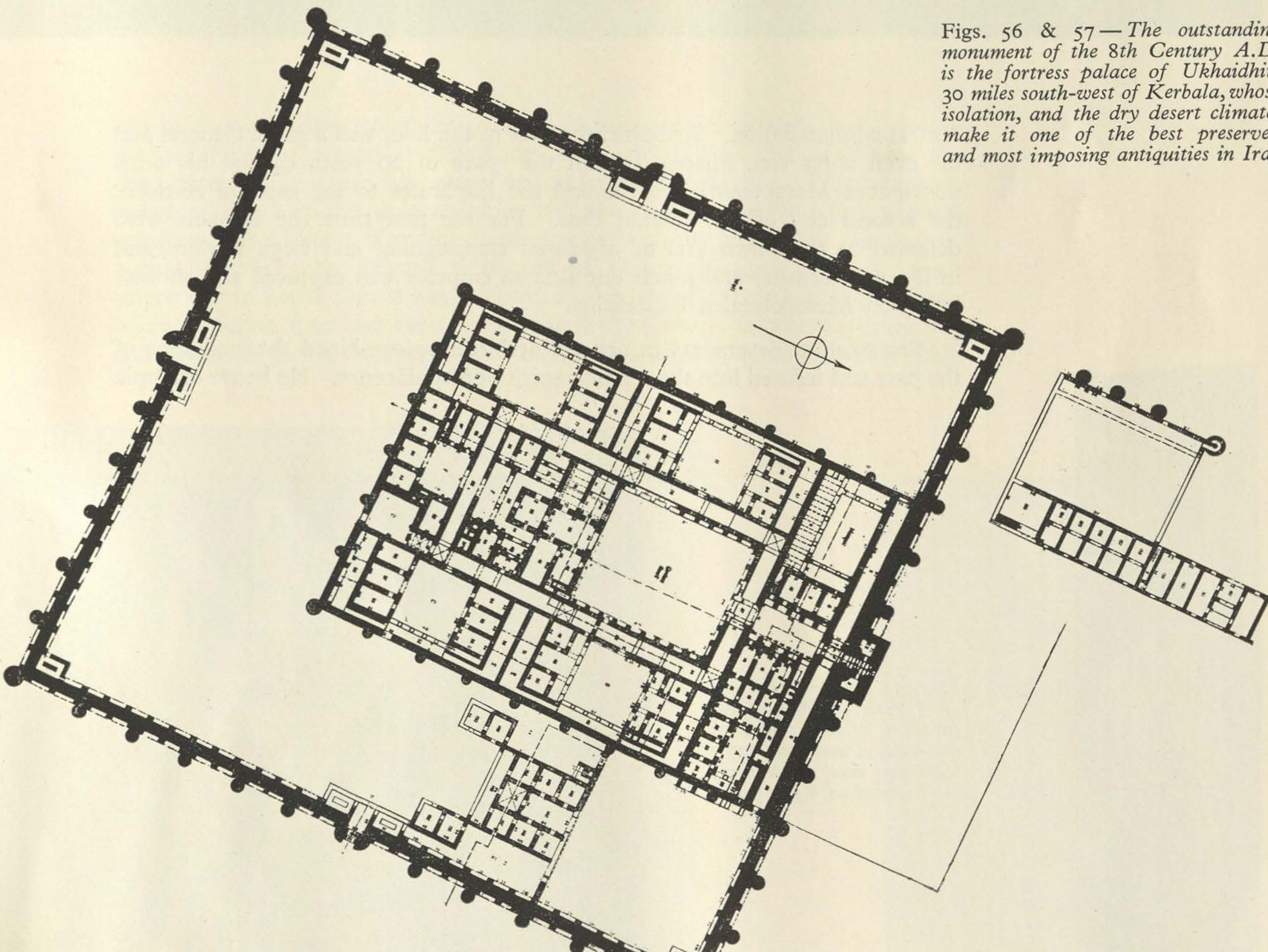


Fig. 55—*The shrine of Sheikh Ma'ruf can probably be ascribed to a Karkh nobleman of that name who died in* 815 *A.D.*

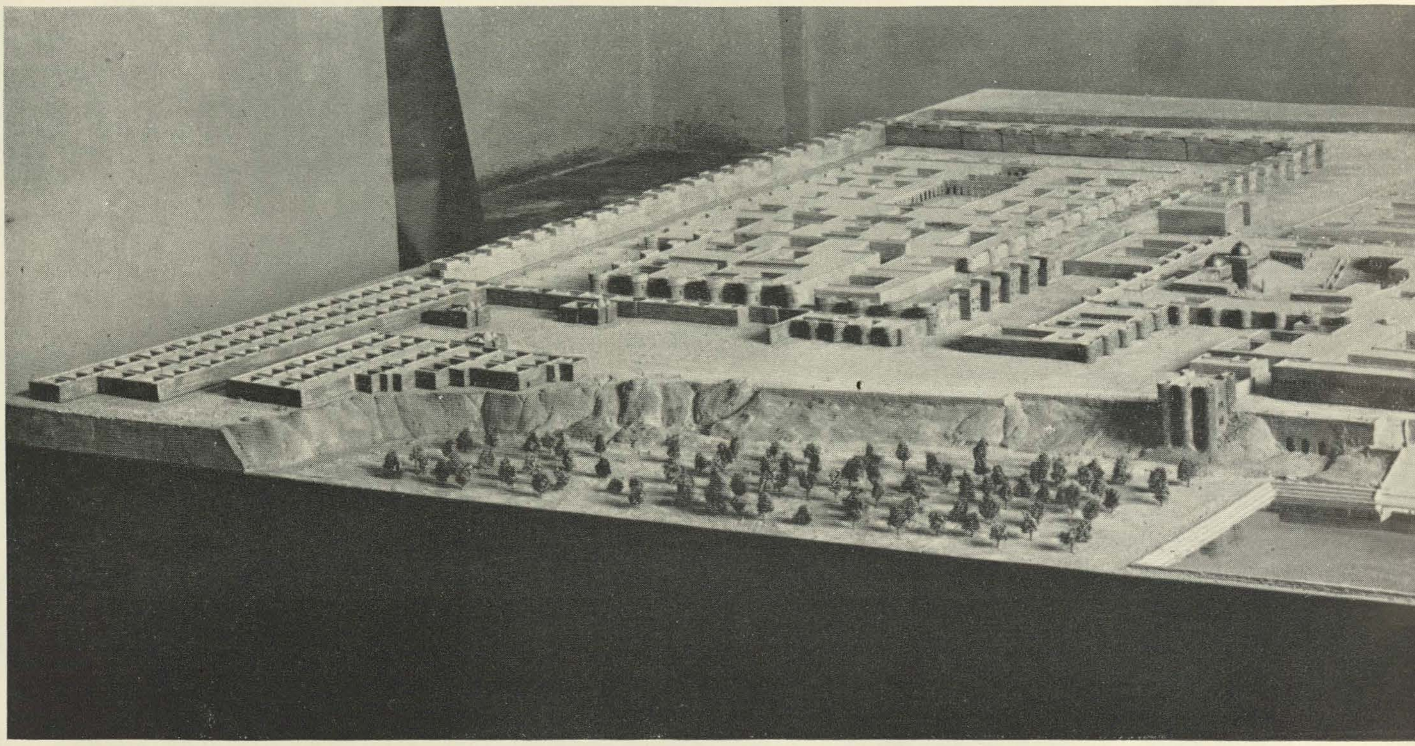
statue, of King Uthal (*Fig.* 49), who reigned probably towards the middle of the Century. Here the king is seen in court dress, bearing in his hands the symbols of civil authority; his satisfied mien is in strong contrast to the rugged power of the old warrior, Sanatruq. But this devotion to the arts of peace was not decay, and Hatra withstood the Romans until the Arsacid kings of Parthia were finally overthrown by a new dynasty in A.D. 226. Then, with her allegiance gone, she allied herself briefly with Rome, and even scored some small successes against the Sassanian usurpers before succumbing to the overwhelming force of the second monarch of the new line, Shapur I, about A.D. 250.

The advent of the Sassanians, whom tradition says were the sons of Sassan, a soldier in the Parthian army, changed little in the character or organisation of the empire, but it brought badly-needed new energy and purpose to its



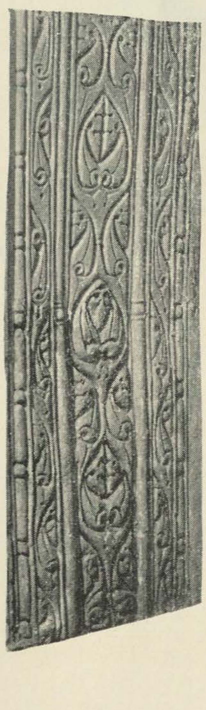


Figs. 56 & 57 — *The outstanding monument of the 8th Century A.D. is the fortress palace of Ukhaidhir, 30 miles south-west of Kerbala, whose isolation, and the dry desert climate, make it one of the best preserved and most imposing antiquities in Iraq*

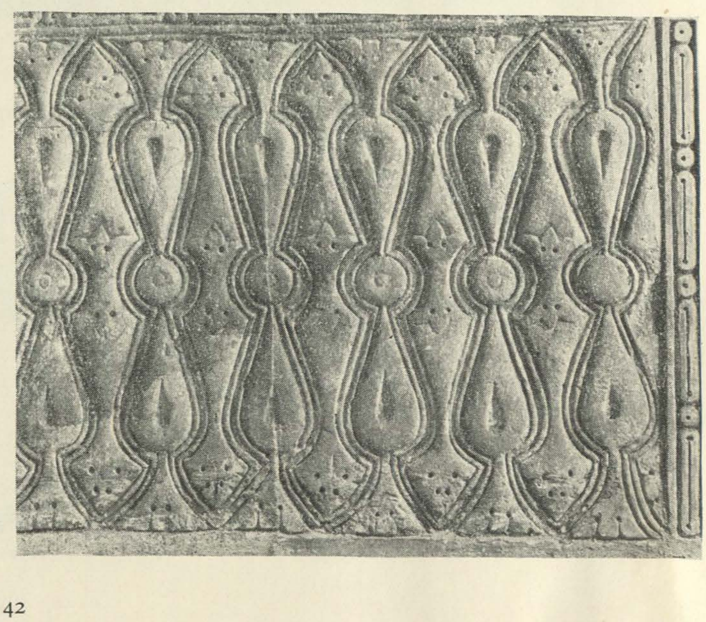


central administration. Ardashir, the first of the line, was a great General and his even abler son, Shapur, within the space of 20 years carried his arms throughout Mesopotamia and beyond the Euphrates to the gates of Antioch, the second city of the Roman East. For the first time the Romans were defeated in their own arts of organised campaigning and siege warfare, and in the next century-and-a-half one Roman emperor was captured and another killed on Mesopotamian battlefields.

Sassanian achievements in art and architecture combined the traditions of the past and infused into them a new spirit of magnificence. No better example



Figs. 59 & 60—*The whole of Caliph Al-Muctasim's fabulous concept covered hundreds of acres and every building was elaborately ornamented with fine stucco*



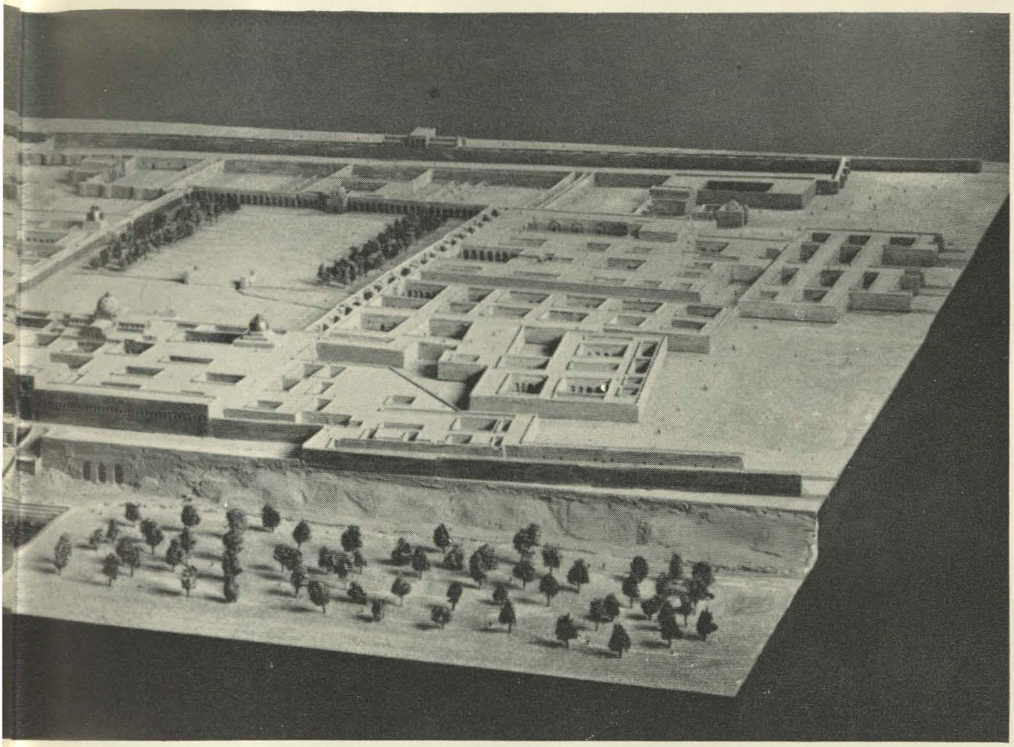
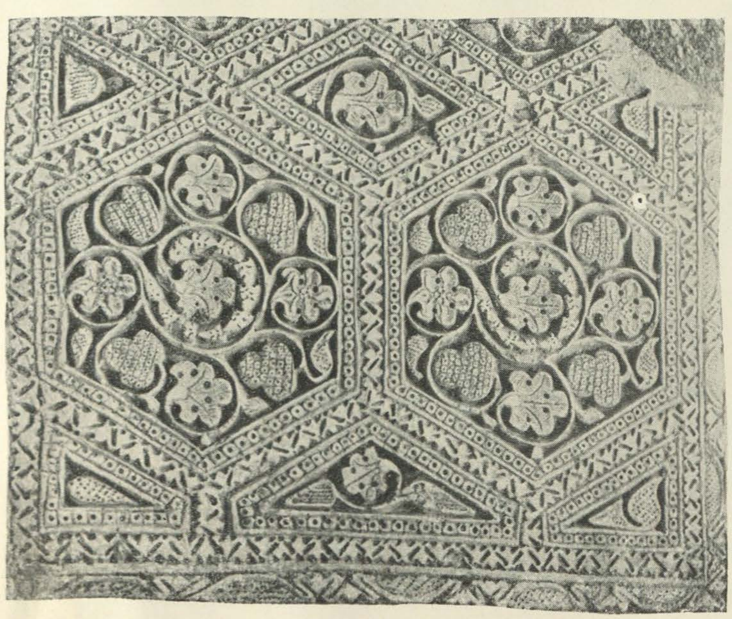


Fig. 58—*At Samarra, on the cliffs overlooking the Tigris from the east, Al-Muctasim built a palace that eclipsed in grandeur even the greatest conceptions of the Assyrian kings. This is a reconstruction of the short-lived city of Samarra*

can be found to illustrate their greatness than the royal palaces on the site of the old Parthian capital at Ctesiphon, built probably in the middle of the 6th Century A.D. when their power was at its height (*Fig.* 50). This enormous structure, of which the main reception hall and one wing of the façade are still standing, is a triumph of architectural engineering—the great vault remains the largest span of unreinforced brickwork in the world—and it is the more interesting to notice that it was achieved by the use of materials and techniques of construction that had been traditional in Iraq since Babylonian times. It was originally richly decorated with moulded stucco ornament of which some



Figs. 59 & 60



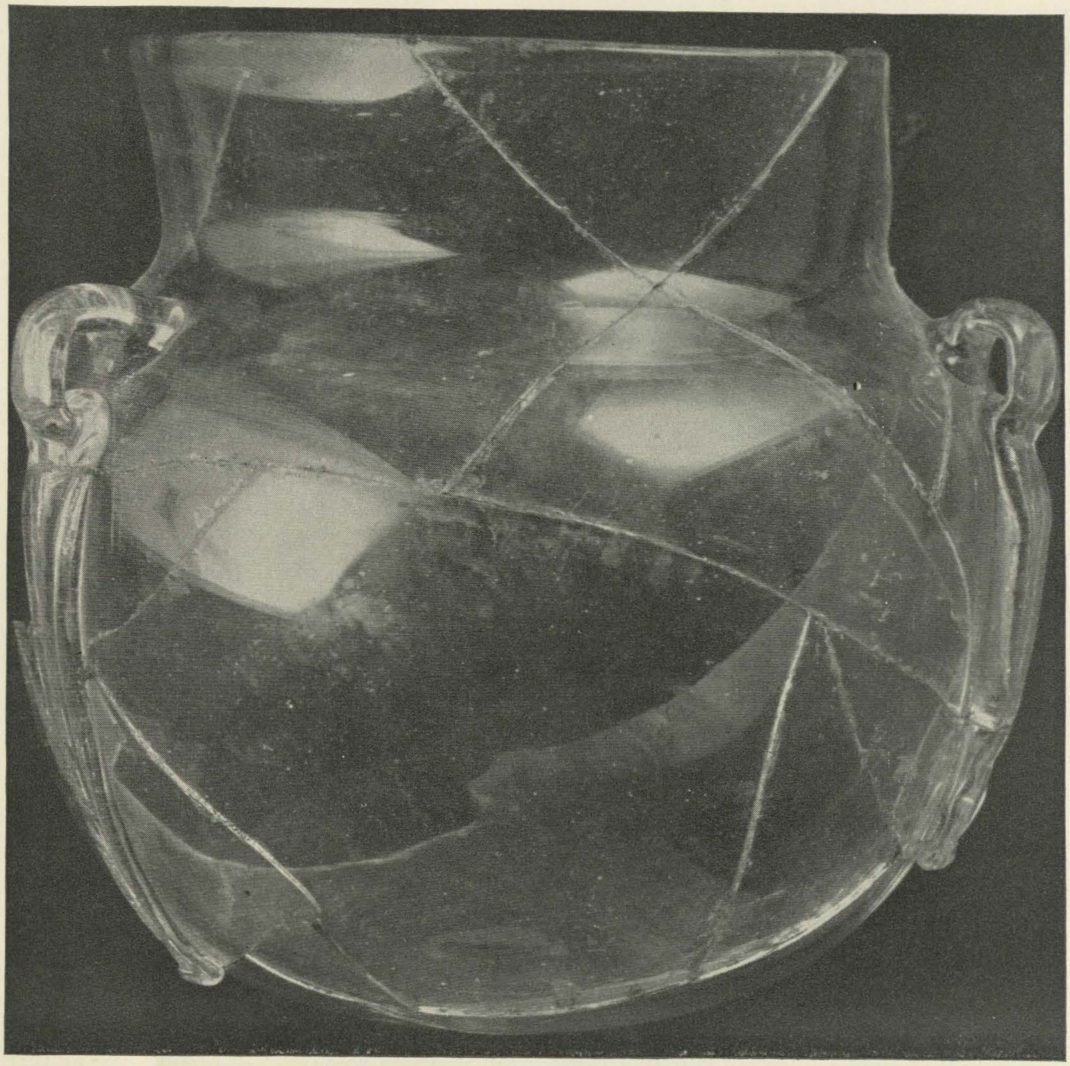
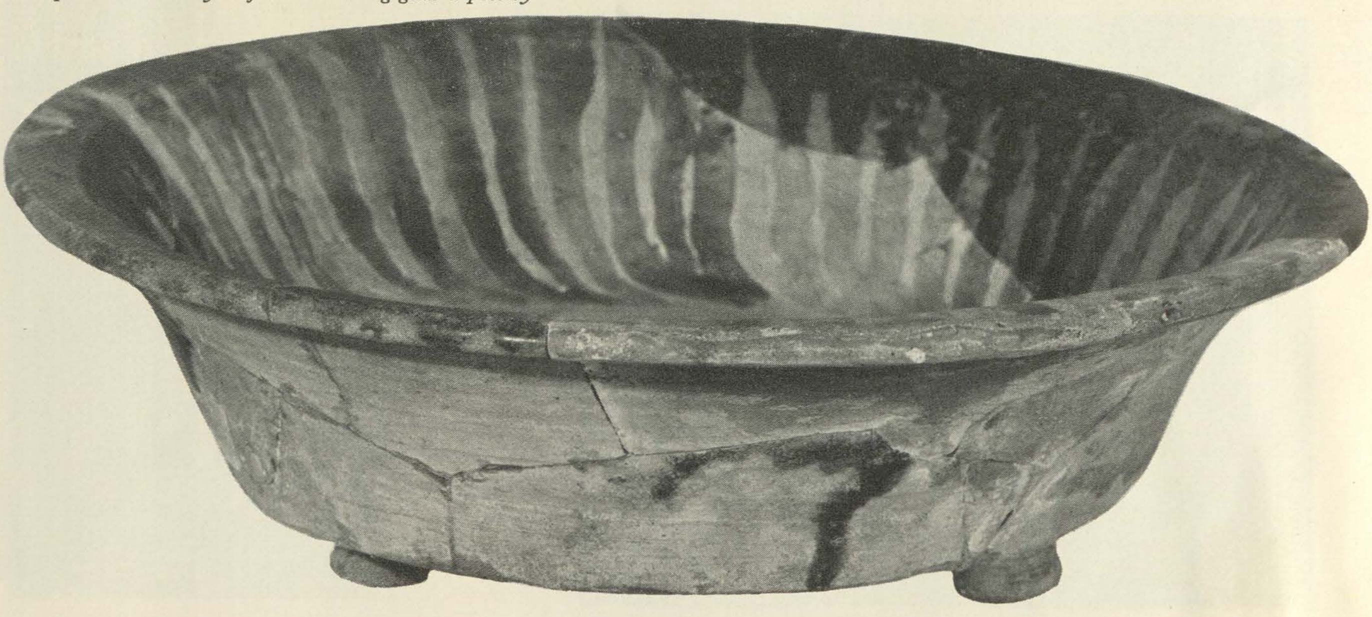


Fig. 61—*A jar in fine glass found at the residence of the Caliph Al-Muctasim at Samarra*

Fig. 62—*A dish in glazed ware decorated with polychromic splashes in the style of Chinese Tong glazed pottery*



examples are reproduced in *Fig.* 51, and furnished with equal magnificence.

The Sassanians ignored the summons to embrace Islam, and the Arab armies stormed across the Tigris and captured Ctesiphon.

The political power of the Sassanians was destroyed, but there can be no doubt that their culture, and the underlying prosperity, whose growth we have traced through many millenia, contributed organisation and resources, both material and intellectual, for the strength of the Abbasid caliphate which rose about 120 years later.

V. IRAQ IN ISLAMIC TIMES

Ctesiphon, which fell in A.D. 637, did not remain the administrative centre of Iraq, for three new cities, Basrah, Kufa, and Wasit, were built by the



Fig. 63—*The great mosque of Samarra, known as the Friday Mosque, is one of the oldest in Iraq*

Arabs the conquerors to confirm their hold on the country, and to form bases from which to extend their conquest eastwards. Excavations at Kufa and Wasit have revealed the earliest mosques in the country. *Fig.* 52 is the ground plan of the mosque built by the Umayyid at Wasit at the beginning of the 8th Century A.D. The early mosques combined in their style simplicity, grandeur and nobility. *Fig.* 53 shows the architectural remains, recently uncovered at Kufa, of the Dar-al-Imara which was built by Sa'd Ibn Abi Waqqas, the Commander-in-Chief of the Arab Army in Iraq. This building was square in area (176 × 176 metres) and surrounded by two lines of walls. Within the inner wall were the residence of the Governor, the treasury house and the military staff quarter. The reception hall was surmounted by a dome which was one of the main features of Dar al Imaras in early Moslem architecture. Kufa was for a time the residence of Imam Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam and son-in-law of the Prophet.



Fig. 64—*After Samarra, Baghdad was the capital of the Caliphs until the fall of the Abbasid Dynasty before the Mongol invasions of the 13th Century. Some imposing monuments of this later period remain in Baghdad, including a charming building known as the Abbasid Palace*

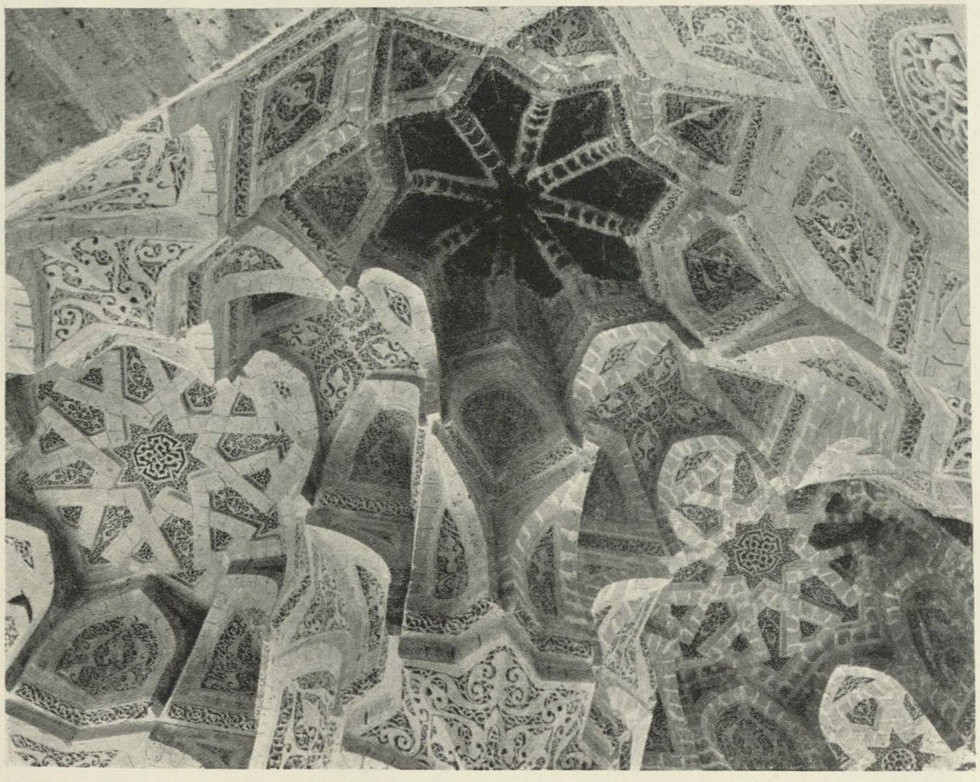


Fig. 65—*It is richly decorated with ornamented bricks arranged into pendants and squinches inside cupolas. Its high, cool, vaulted rooms and lovely iwan have now been restored by the Department of Antiquities and house an important collection of Islamic* objets d'art

His tomb at the mosque of Najaf, not far from Kufa, and that of his son Hussein in the mosque of Kerbela, are places of veneration and pilgrimage.

The Caliphate, which combined spiritual with temporal powers in the person of the Caliph, passed in A.D. 750 to the Abbasids, the descendants of Abbas, an uncle of the Prophet.

Abu-al-Abbas Assaffah, the first of the Abbasid Caliphs, built himself a new residence at Anbar on the Euphrates, but he died after a reign of only four years, and his brother and successor, Al-Mansur, looked about for a new capital, so Baghdad made its first appearance in history. The Round City of Abu Ja'far Al-Mansur, called Medinatas-Salam, the City of Peace, lay on the west bank of the Tigris. It had a double oûter wall, 3,000 yards in diameter, and an inner wall nearly 90 feet high enclosing the government buildings, with the royal palace at the centre. Markets grew up outside the Basrah gate in the merchants' quarter still known as Karkh, while the palace of the heir-apparent and the barracks on the east bank of the river in the Rusafah quarter represented the earliest settlement on the site of modern Baghdad. The Round City was the capital of the Abbasid Empire in its greatest period under the legendary Harun al Rashid, grandson of Al-Mansur, who reigned from 786 to 806 A.D.; and under these two great rulers Baghdad became not only the scene of pomp and luxury that we know from *The Arabian Nights*, but also a centre of culture and the arts such as has rarely been equalled in history. One important invention, paper, was first introduced from China under Al-Mansur and the Caliphs took immediate advantage of the opportunities it offered by commissioning literary and scientific works. They collected at their court the most distinguished scholars of the age without regard to birth or origin, and preserved in their libraries new texts and translations of the greatest earlier works on philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and every branch of learning. For a long time many works of the Greek philosophers were known to Europe only through their Arabic translations, and Isaac Newton is said to have profited greatly from his study of the Arab mathematicians. One of the well-known translators of Arab works is Gelbert who in A.D. 979 became the Pope Selvseter II. The Caliph Al-Mamun, son of Harun al Rashid, was the patron of the earliest accurate attempts to determine the length of a degree of longitude, which was carried out in the desert of Sinjar, south-west of Mosul. The fundamental principles of analytic geometry were laid down. One of the great mathematicians of this period was Al-Khurarizmi, from whose name the word logarithm is derived.

Very few buildings of the early Abbasid period have survived in Baghdad itself, owing to its chequered history and the constant change and development inevitable in a capital city. The charming shrine said to be the tomb of the wife of Harun al Rashid, Sitt Zubaida (*Fig.* 54), is more likely to be of the late Abbasid period, though its neighbour, the shrine of Sheikh Ma'ruf, can probably be ascribed to a Karkh nobleman of that name who died in A.D. 815 (*Fig.* 55). The outstanding monument of the 8th Century, however, is the fortress palace of Ukhaidhir (*Fig.* 56), 30 miles south-west of Kerbela, whose isolation, and the dry desert climate, make it one of the best preserved and most imposing antiquities in Iraq. It was probably built by Isa ibn Musa, nephew of the Caliph Al-Mansur, who was persuaded to renounce his claim to the succession and retired to Ukhaidhir to live the life of a millionaire recluse. The palace is enclosed by a strong outer wall, with the imposing main gateway on the north side; this led into the entrance hall, with a private mosque on the right, and thence into the principal courtyard of the palace, surrounded by buildings three storeys high, with the main iwan reception chamber of the same essential type as we have seen at Hatra and Ctesiphon, facing the entrance (*Fig.* 57). The rest of the building is taken up by the domestic quarter, and five private suites, each with its own courtyard.

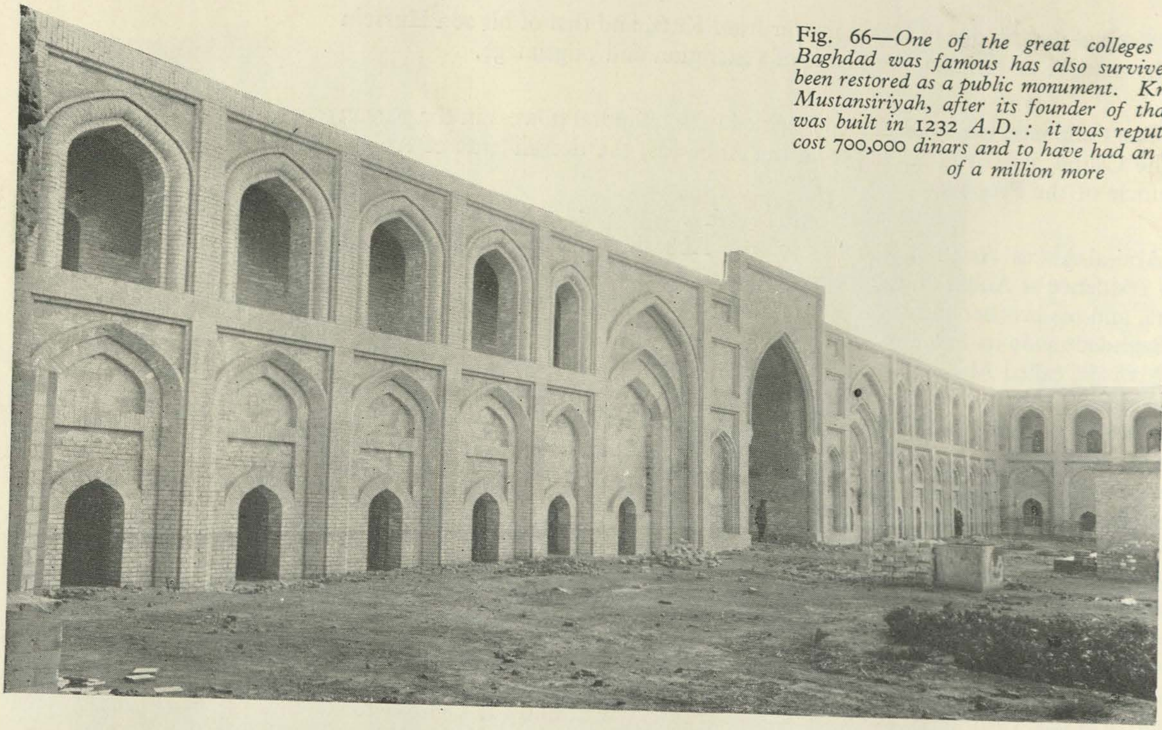


Fig. 66—*One of the great colleges for which Baghdad was famous has also survived and has been restored as a public monument. Known as the Mustansiriyah, after its founder of that name, it was built in 1232 A.D. : it was reputed to have cost 700,000 dinars and to have had an endowment of a million more*

Fig. 67—*The only vestige of the ancient walls of Baghdad is the Bab al Wastani, or Middle Gate, on the east side of the city : it has been restored and is now used as an Arms Museum*

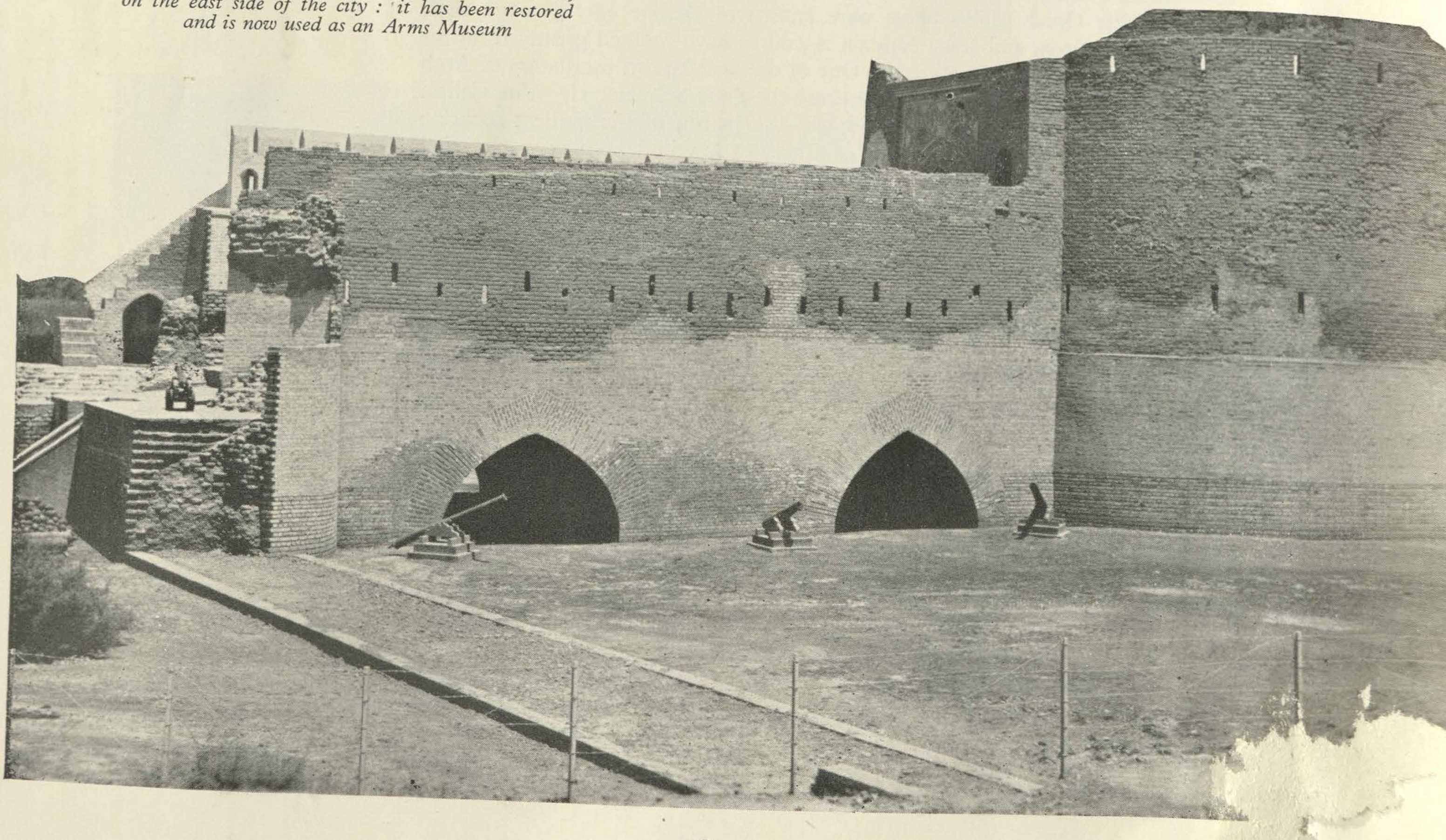




Fig. 69—*Many bridges and khans on the roads of the north bear witness to the Atabegs' appreciation of the importance of communications. This bridge at Zakho is typical of their work*

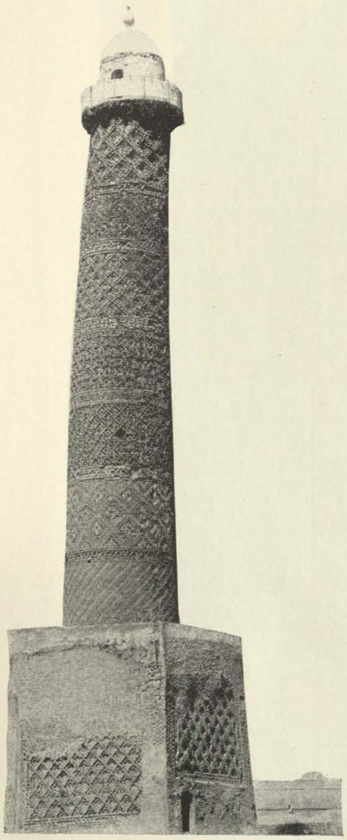


Fig. 68—*The minaret of the Great Mosque in Mosul, built in 1172 A.D., is a superb example of Atabeg decorative brickwork*

Fig. 70—*The ruins of the palace of Badr ad Din, last of the Atabeg line, who reigned from 1234 to 1258 A.D., may still be seen on the bank of the Tigris in Mosul*



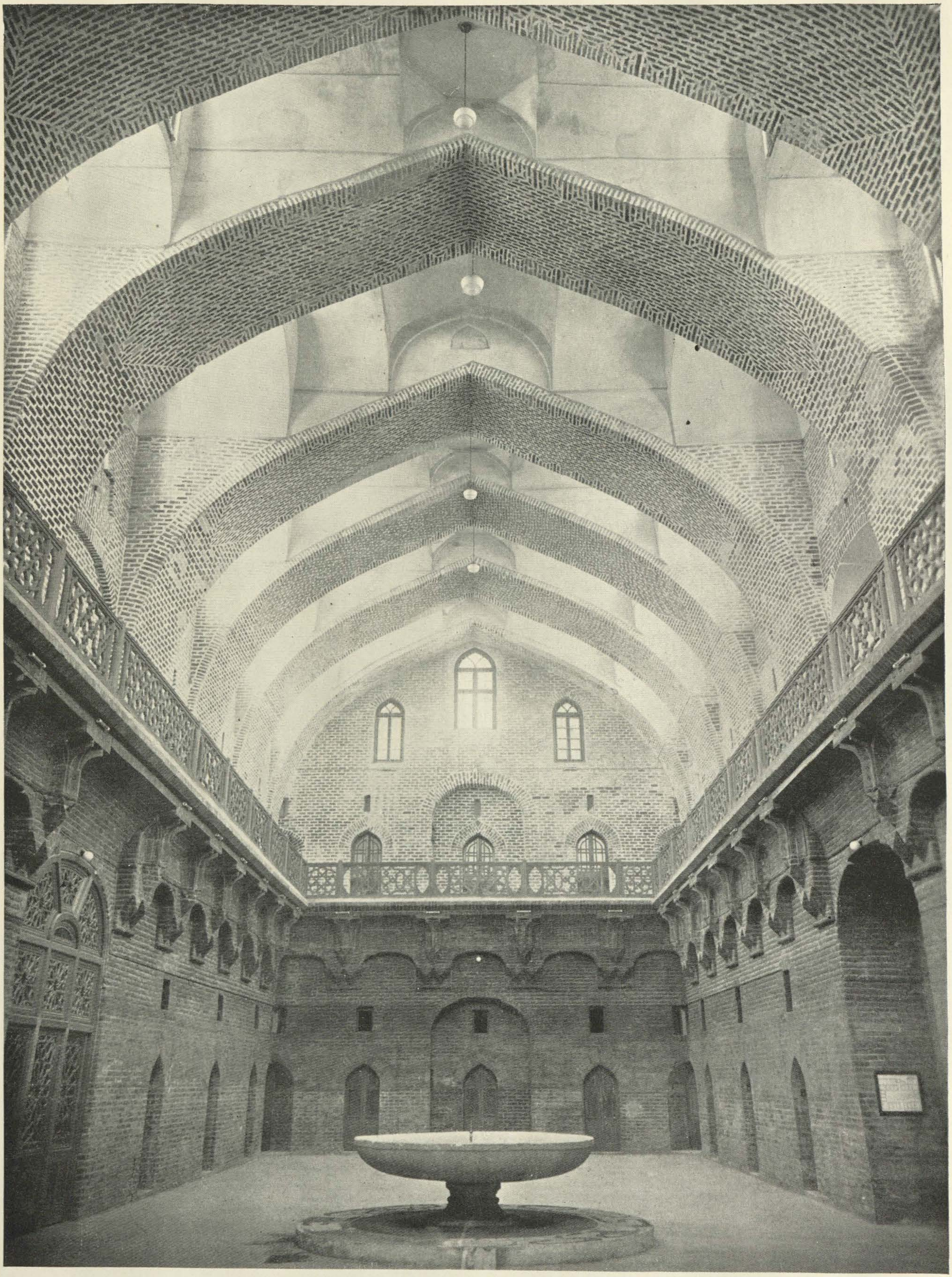


Fig. 71—*The Khan Marjan, an excellent example of 14th Century architecture*

Ukhaidhir, impressive as it is, was a country mansion, and to realise the full splendour of a royal residence we must look at the short-lived city which was founded by the Caliph Al-Muctasim, successor of Al-Mamun, in 833. It is said that Al-Muctasim was forced to seek a new capital by the unruly behaviour of his Turkish slave-bodyguard in the streets of Baghdad, and he chose the site of Samarra, 70 miles north-west of the "City of Peace." Here, on the cliffs overlooking the Tigris from the east, he built for himself a palace which eclipsed in grandeur even the greatest conceptions of the Assyarian kings (*Fig.* 58). In the valley below were gardens with pavilions and an artificial lake, from which a monumental stairway led up to a terrace and the main gate of the palace at the top of the cliff. On the left beyond the triple arch lay the Caliph's private apartments, on the right the harem, and ahead the magnificent suite of reception rooms, with the great iwan throne room to the north. Across another courtyard, with domestic and administrative buildings on either side, was the summer palace, whose reception chamber was built largely below ground level, like the cool *sirdabs* which are traditional in the architecture of Iraq. Beyond this again lay a polo ground, divided by the Caliph's own grand-stand from the nearest loop of his private race-course, which was laid out in quatrefoil pattern with a second grand-stand at the centre. The whole fabulous concept covered hundreds of acres of ground, and every building was elaborately decorated with fine stucco ornament, of which examples were recovered from the excavations (*Figs.* 59 *and* 60).

The best craftsmen of that time were encouraged to live at Samarra and to produce some of the best pieces of art. *Fig.* 61 is a jar in fine glass found at the residence of the Caliph Al-Muctasim at Samarra. *Fig.* 62 is a dish in glazed ware decorated with polychromic splashes, in the style of Chinese Tong glazed pottery.

The great mosque of Samarra, known as the Friday Mosque, (*Fig.* 63), is one of the oldest in Iraq and, despite its impressive size and massive buttressed walls, well illustrates the simplicity of early Muslim places of worship, which consisted in essence of a courtyard for the congregation with a covered space containing the *mihrab* and pulpit. Its spiral minaret, still a conspicuous landmark in the countryside, was built before the design of the minaret had been standardised as the slim round tower familiar to us in later periods, and its form may have been suggested by the Babylonian ziggurat. The rest of the city was laid out on the same grandiose scale; the Caliph Mutawakkil built himself a new quarter to the north, and it is still possible to walk down the great main street, more than 90 feet wide, that linked the two parts of the city, and to see on either side the façades of shops and private houses standing almost to their original height.

Samarra owes its excellent preservation in part to the shortness of its existence as a capital city for, only 50 years after its foundation, it was abandoned and the Caliphs returned to Baghdad, which remained their capital until the fall of the Abbasid Dynasty before the Mongol invasions of the 13th Century. Some imposing monuments of this later period remain in modern Baghdad, including a charming building known as the Abbasid Palace (*Fig.* 64). It is richly decorated with ornamented bricks arranged into pendants and squinches inside cupolas (*Fig.* 65). Its high, cool vaulted rooms and lovely iwan have now been restored by the Department of Antiquities and house an important collection of Islamic *objets d'art.*

One of the great colleges for which Baghdad was famous has also survived, and after a chequered history has also been restored as a public monument. It is known as the Mustansiriyah, after its founder the Caliph Al-Mustansir, by whom it was built in A.D. 1232; it was reputed to have cost 700,000 dinars, and to have had an endowment of a million more. Its two-storeyed façade (*Fig.* 66), with a fine late Arabic inscription, can be seen on the river-front

just below Al-Mamonn Bridge. It originally contained four law schools, representing the four orthodox sects of Islam, together with a magnificent library, as well as its own kitchens, baths and hospital. It probably owed its survival after the disastrous siege of Baghdad in 1258, when so many of the great Abbasid buildings were destroyed, to the fact that Hulagu Khan, the Mongol conqueror, ordered the chief scholars and notables of the city to meet him there. Another monument of the period, and the only vestige of the ancient walls of Baghdad, is the Bab al Wastani, or Middle Gate, on the east side of the city (*Fig.* 67); it also has been restored and is now used as an Arms Museum. This gate in Abbasid times was the head of the road that ran across the highlands of Persia to the Province of Khorassan, the highway that may be regarded as the main artery of the Abbasid empire. Indeed, Abbasid administration in its great days challenged comparison with anything the Middle East has ever seen. Its territories were spanned by a network of roads, radiating first from the Round City and then from the later capital on the eastern bank; these roads were provided with bridges, large *khans* or inns at distances of a day's march, and posting stations where the official mail could change

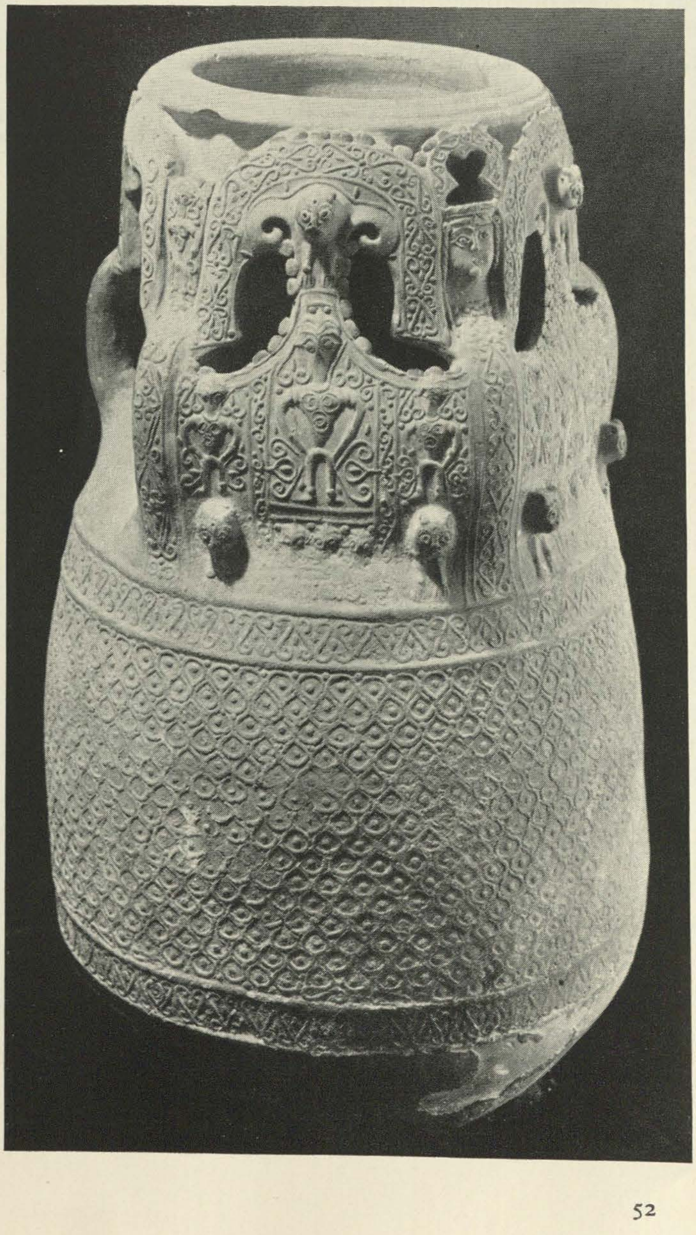


Fig. 72—*Several industries flourished at the end of the Abbasid period. Here is a large pottery jar decorated in the Barbotine style with figures and geometric designs.*

horses and couriers. The Caliphs maintained and extended the canal systems that had brought wealth to Iraq since the dawn of history, and the enormous revenues of which we see evidence on their princely buildings were the product of good organisation and, in the main, wise government.

In the last two centuries of their existence the grip of the Abbasids on their empire loosened, and this weakness had one notable effect on the cultural history of Iraq—the rise of an independent dynasty, the Atabegs, in the north, and the consequent rebirth of Mosul as a great city, the heir to Nineveh. The Atabegs in their heydey controlled the northern plains from the Zagros Mountains to the Mediterranean, and they too were great patrons of the arts, especially architecture. Many examples of their work, in brick and in the native marble and limestone of Northern Iraq, are to be found in Mosul itself. *Fig.* 68 shows the minaret of the Great Mosque built by Nur-ad-Din Zangi in A.D. 1172, and a superb example of Atabeg decorative brickwork.

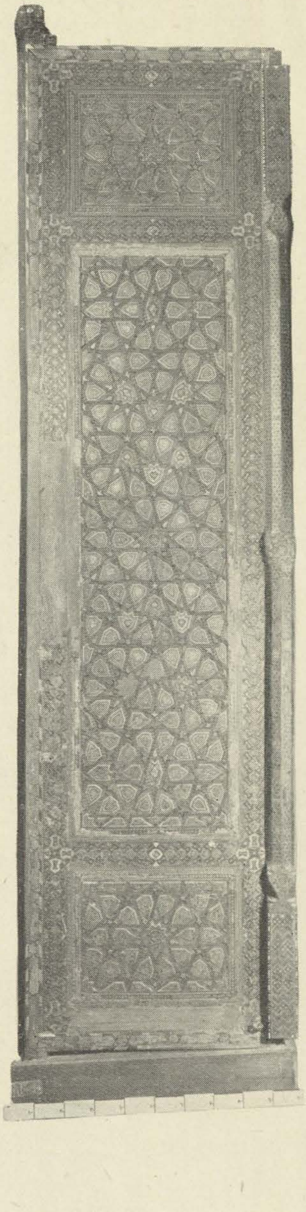
Many bridges and *khans* on the roads of the north bear witness that the Atabegs, too, realised the importance of communications for prosperity and firm government. The bridge at Zakho, on the highway running north from Mosul into Anatolia, is typical of their work (*Fig.* 69), and we have an excellent example of the carving of the period on the doorway of the great *khan* on the Sinjar Road whose inscription records its erection by the last of the Atabeg line, Badr ad Din Lulu, who reigned from A.D. 1234 to 1258. The ruins of the palace of Badr ad Din may still be seen on the bank of the Tigris in Mosul, a short distance below the citadel (*Fig.* 70). He fell, as did his contemporary the Caliph Al-Mustansir, in Baghdad before the savage onslaught of Hulagu, and Iraq north and south came under the barbarous dominion of a Mongol dynasty. This was the virtual end of independence and prosperity, though occasional buildings in Baghdad bear witness to the piety of an alien Governor or an Ottoman Sultan. The Khan Marjan (*Fig.* 71) is an excellent example of 14th Century architecture, built as part of the endowment of the nearby mosque and college by Marjan Il-Khanid, Governor of Baghdad in A.D. 1356. But in general it may be said that the original inspiration of the peoples of Mesopotamia, which had contributed so much to so many periods of history, lay dormant under the foreign yoke; and we make no apology for closing our account of Iraq's early history with the fall of her native Caliphate.

Several industries flourished at the end of the Abbasid periods. *Fig.* 72 shows a large pottery jar decorated in the Barbotine style with figures and geometric designs. *Fig.* 73 is a wooden door meticulously decorated with inlays of ivory in Arabesque style which could be seen in the brick ornaments of al-Mustansiriyah and the Abbasid Palace at Baghdad.

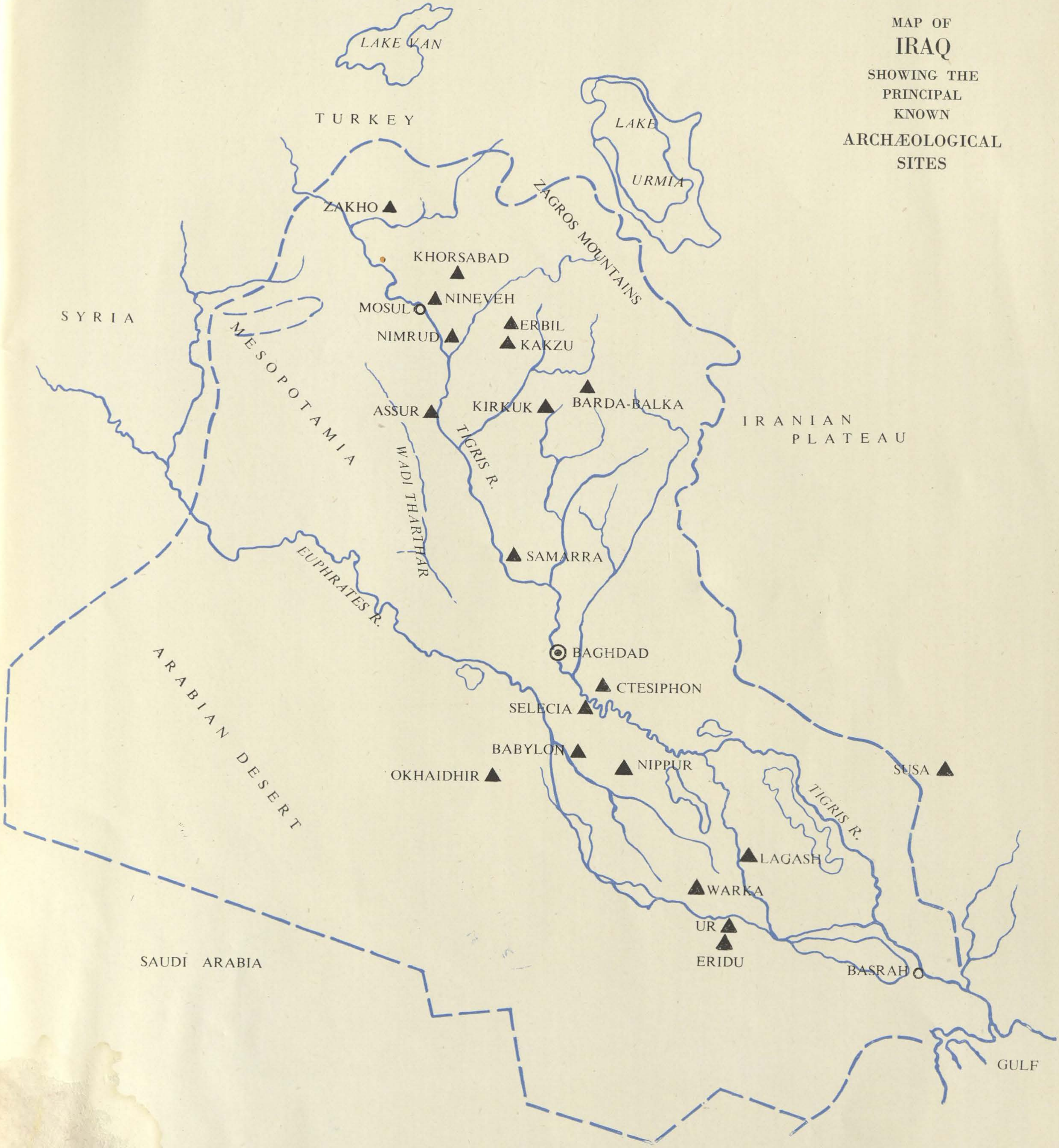
* * * * * *

The work of restoring Iraq's ancient monuments, of which some account is given in these pages, has gone on apace since the restoration of her independence under the late King Faisal I, the grandfather of His Majesty King Faisal II, and side by side with the work of reconstruction has gone the task of investigating her glorious past. The civilisations we have described are not dead; their people and their cities are buried, but their heritage lives on in every country of the Western World. Our efforts to recover and preserve their material remains are encouraged by the growing interest both of our own people and of our guests. It is our sincere hope that we shall be rewarded by an increasing number of visitors anxious to see and to learn more about our common inheritance.

Fig. 73—*A wooden door meticulously decorated with inlays of ivory in Arabesque style which could be seen in the brick ornaments of al-Mustansiriyah and the Abbasid Palace at Baghdad*



MAP OF
IRAQ
SHOWING THE
PRINCIPAL
KNOWN
ARCHÆOLOGICAL
SITES



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